




AN OLD MAN'S
IDYL

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.archive.org/details/oldmansidyl00johnuoft>

LE.
J715 n2

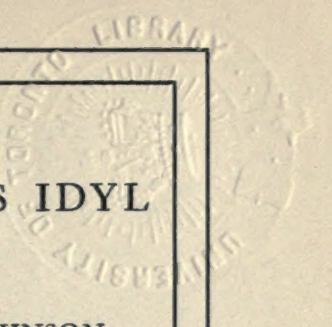
AN
OLD MAN'S IDYL

By
WOLCOTT JOHNSON



CHICAGO
A. C. McCLURG & CO.

1905



113504
11 6 11



COPYRIGHT BY
A. C. McCLURG & Co.
1905
—

Published April 15, 1905

UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE, U.S.A.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE FROLIC OF THE LEAVES . . .	9
II. THE HAPPY CLOSE OF A DISAP- POINTING DAY	18
III. FAREWELL TO OUR BABY GIRL . .	22
IV. THE FOND FATHER GOES AWAY FROM HOME	31
V. A TALE OF WOE	39
VI. A "COMMONPLACE" SUNDAY . .	44
VII. "ON'Y POOTY DOOD"	53
VIII. ALMOST BUCOLIC	61
IX. STILL BUCOLIC—ALMOST	68
X. SUNDAY MORNING AT HOME—A FRAGMENT	72
XI. AN EVENING WITH THE ANIMALS IN THE PARK	75
XII. FOURTH OF JULY—A TRYING IN- CIDENT ON THE RIVER	79
XIII. WE TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR	92

CONTENTS

	PAGE
XIV. ADA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY . . .	106
XV. TRYING TO TOUCH BOTTOM . .	112
XVI. THE GRANDMA'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY	116
XVII. IN A REMINISCENT MOOD—OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE . .	124
XVIII. HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS	143
XIX. AGAIN REMINISCENT—OUR HONEYMOON ABROAD . . .	160
XX. THE HUMOR OF IT	166
XXI. THE SENTIMENTAL SIDE OF IT .	179
XXII. A DIP INTO HISTORY . . .	185
XXIII. IN OSTEND, BUT NOT OF IT . .	191
XXIV. SOMEWHAT LOST IN LONDON .	199
XXV. IN SCOTLAND AND THE LAKE COUNTRY	207
XXVI. BETWEEN SEA AND SKY . . .	214
XXVII. OUR FIRST OUTING SINCE THE CHILDREN CAME	219
XXVIII. STORY OF SIX HAPPY YEARS .	237
XXIX. A DAY OF DAYS	249
XXX. LAST WORDS	257

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL



I

THE FROLIC OF THE LEAVES

NOVEMBER 25, 1879. — I have just come home from a walk with the children, and find myself strangely stirred by a trifling incident. As we neared a wind-swept corner of the highest height overlooking the river a small avalanche of leaves came swooping down upon us from the west, quickly followed by another from the north. The two air currents met at the very point where we stood watching the elemental play. The rival currents utilized us as a pivot, and in a moment myriad rustling leaves were closing in and whirling in a merry dance about us. The

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

girls fairly screamed with glee. Never before had they seen Mother Nature in such a rollicking mood, and they eagerly accepted her invitation to join in the frolic. I took a seat upon a bank of green near by to watch the fun.

There was a moment's calm, followed by a fierce gust from the west, which sent the leaves flying helter-skelter down the hill. My coltish four-year-old started in swift pursuit of "the fairies," and the clumsier two-year-old went tumbling after. The little one slowly picked herself up and came limping toward me, crying "Pa-a-pa ! Pa-a-pa !" with that circumflex of woe which our little one so well knows how to use.

Meantime the wind had shifted, and the scurrying army of leaves, as if panic-stricken, speedily executed an about-face and retreated up the hill. Ada, the elder, entered into the fun with all the enthusiasm of her highly

THE FROLIC OF THE LEAVES

strung nature, laughing at the top of her voice as she ran, her arms out and her fingers spread. Marie, though almost blinded with tears, speedily caught the contagion of laughter, between laughs exclaiming, "Papa, yee me! Papa, yee me!" (I may add right here that the key to Marie's pronunciation is the substitution of y for s and w for f.)

The wind subsided. The leaves lay heaped in a straggling pile in the centre of the street, like a huge coil more or less broken in the winding. Soon the little ones were rolling in the leaves, now one, now the other on top. Next they pelted each other with leaves, the smaller standing her ground right manfully, or boyfully, though outclassed in height and weight.

Then came a change. A spiteful gust and whirl unwound the coil, and the outer line started off with a rush down the hill, pursued by the main body of the fairies. The battalion

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

of pursuers moved on the deserters, not in soldierly order, but first with boyish hop, skip, and jump, and then with a wild flight in air — every fairy for himself. The children joined in hopeless pursuit of the pursuers, glad to take even a losing part in the game. Then back again came the rustling battalion, first surrounding, then passing the deserters.

As the little ones ran past me the older cried out, "Such fun, papa!" and the younger repeated the words, "Yut wun!"

Finally the two, tired and flushed with the unwonted exercise, came over to the grass plot where I lay watching the miniature carnival of life and death, — Ada's tawny skin now red as wine, Marie's face suffused with an inimitable peach-blow tint, their sunbrowned bosoms rising and falling with every breath, their blue eyes dancing with the glee left over from the race. One enthusiastically declared she never had had such fun, and the

THE FROLIC OF THE LEAVES

other self-satisfiedly grunted her assent to the statement.

We went home, the tired little two-year-old in my arms, a chubby hand thrust down my neck, Ada squeezing my disengaged hand, and between breaths jabbering like a monkey, detailing the story she would tell her mamma of the jolly race with the fairies.

All this time the undercurrent of my thought was on the mad race my own past life had been, now in this direction, now in that; at one time in a whirl of pleasure, the whirl ending in nothing of actual possession; at another in pursuit of some cherished object, the pursuit ending in humiliating retreat; then a determined rally, then a soul-comforting victory growing out of defeat — the victory achieved by the substitution of some prize undreamt of at the outset. And after all the hurrying and scurrying, the elation and the heartache, the self-complacency and the groaning and sweat-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

ing under self-imposed but none the less weary loads,— after all, an indecisive ending, a drawn battle, my only real, soul-satisfying successes those which were found at the end of some uninviting road.

In the fast-gathering gloom of this November evening, reflecting on my past and philosophizing on its significance, I am moved to undertake in earnest the execution of a purpose long fondly entertained, — that of leaving for those who love me a record — fragmentary at best — of a happy life begun so late that my most skeptical friends could scarcely have been less confident than was I that it would last. Now that pencil has actually touched paper with this intent, the words come as if wind-swept like the leaves, — all too fast for my slow-moving hand. The most I dare hope to accomplish is the preparation of a few phonographic reproductions of familiar talks with myself, likening them as far as possible to the

THE FROLIC OF THE LEAVES

family heart-talks of early evening-time, when tongues that have wagged all day are content to give only a word of assent or put some leading question ; when, the volubility of youth having spent itself, the garrulity of age finds its opportunity. It is my aim to put upon paper from time to time some of the otherwise unremembered events and occurrences, thoughts and emotions, that shall seem to me to illustrate our daily life during these last years.

My happiness came late, but the essential fact is that it came. When confronted with that other fact, to which reference has already been made,—that the particular happiness which is mine, and which I would not dare, and do not desire, to exchange for any other kind of happiness, could not have been mine had any one of my past sorrows and losses been turned aside from me,—when brought face to face with this overwhelming thought,

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

I am compelled by the simple logic of cause and consequence to thank God even for the sorrows and the losses.

But, oh, how many years it has taken me to be able to say this from the heart! Verily, that was a good gospel which the people of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra heard from the lips of Paul and Barnabas, that the way to the Kingdom is traversed only by those who pass through much tribulation. And where is the Kingdom, — or so much of it as is revealed to us mortals, — if it is not in the happy home where the rule of love is an unbroken law?

Bear in mind that I have set out to portray, not an ideal home life in which reality is sacrificed to picturesque effects, but rather a real home life where love is law and character is creed, though the working of that law is far from perfect and the living of that creed far from ideal. Thankful to the rhapsodists and the idealists for the pictures they have given

THE FROLIC OF THE LEAVES

us of the Divine Family, *my* simpler purpose is to picture for my friends a human — very human — family, shortcomings and all, leaving in the dark background the tribulations out of which the solitary “lone wandering but not lost” finally came to his own.



II

THE HAPPY CLOSE OF A DISAPPOINT- ING DAY

JUNE 20, 1880. — Infirm of purpose! Nearly seven months have passed without a single line written in fulfilment of the intent so solemnly recorded in November last! It is plain thus early that the "human document" planned by me will mainly be the result of circumstance, not of deliberate choice of material — the consequent of mood rather than settled purpose.

Coming home to-night after a disappointing day, I fell to wondering whether or not I could

CLOSE OF A DISAPPOINTING DAY

so effectually conceal my low spirits as to elude the loving first glance of the wife and the expectant eyes of the children. As I turned the corner, a half block from the house, I saw the little ones straining their necks through the vines on the porch to see if papa was among the street-car arrivals. On discovering me my Ada held high her hand and waved it vigorously — her wonted signal. I answered with a reassuring wave, and then such a shout, rising above the rumble of the ice-wagon and the loud clatter of horses' hoofs!

“It's papa, mamma! It's papa, Marie!” cried Ada in frantic glee, and as she rushed toward me she screamed, “Papa! papa! papa!” Close behind her came toddling Marie, she too crying “Papa!” at the top of her voice.

Out of breath they flung themselves into my arms, and with clinging wet lips received the kisses they well knew awaited them.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Noting their red faces and heavy breathing I sat down with them upon a neighbor's terrace; and there between breaths and in hasty catch-words Ada narrated the various little, unimportant, but to her all-important events of her day, interspersing the story with many gleeful giggles and gestures and much rolling and dancing of eyes, concluding with an account of some newly devised scheme invented by mamma for the children's amusement. As the voluble one recited her story, the silent one corroborated its every detail with a grunt and a shake of the head.

In the midst of the spirited narrative the mother, whose smiling face had already greeted me from the centre of a frame of woodbine enveloping our porch, stepped down from her picture and came across the street to meet me. How cool and comfortable she looked in her plain white waist! How tall she seemed as she stood between the

CLOSE OF A DISAPPOINTING DAY

little ones, her face almost on a level with mine!

In the midst of our greetings the tea-bell rang and we started home, the wife and mother leaning on one arm, Ada clinging to the other, and Marie tugging at her mamma's skirt.

On the way to the table I recalled the woes of the day and grimly smiled at the undue prominence I had given them. The wife saw the smile and commanded me to interpret it to her. I threw her off the scent by asking her if she could n't guess. She gave me a self-complacent smile and changed the subject.



III

FAREWELL TO OUR BABY GIRL

AUGUST 18, 1880. — Our Ada was five years old to-day. Birthday presents and a cake decorated with five candles "and one to grow on" were the only special observances of the event.

Before my baby girl's escape is complete, and before the school girl takes her place, I want to devote the evening, or part of it, to an identification of the child. To this end I have been looking over a precious memorandum book kept by the mother during Ada's babyhood. How vividly the record brings back

FAREWELL TO OUR BABY GIRL

that memorable day five years ago when in the early evening a vigorous child-cry announced the fulfilment of our hopes and the beginning of a new era in our home! I shall always hold as a choice possession the memory of the smile with which the madonna of our household looked down upon the flesh-and-blood realization of her dream,—her child, our child,—and actually drawing nourishment from her breast! The miracle, old as life itself, yet ever new and marvellous, the miracle of being, transmitted from mother to child, quite overwhelmed us. That was an hour of solemn joy to both, and doubly so to me, for I had long given entertainment to an unwelcome guest—the fear that instead of gaining a child I might lose from my home the very light of my life. To the last moment no shadow had been thrown upon Mary's vision of sunny skies. To the last she had cheerily waited in confident expectation.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Happy before, she was supremely happy then.

.
Another memory: it is the half-hour devoted to the baby's bath! I am standing in the doorway leading to our little bathroom, a rapt gazer on the miracle of new and vigorous life, the little one splashing and crowing and laughing in an ecstasy of joy. How large for her that little green-painted tub was then! It is simply impossible now.

.
I pass hurriedly over the memory of that inevitable colicky period when the heart-rending question, "Can she live through it?" *would* come to our lips again and again.

.
I must linger a moment over the baby's first Christmas, celebrated by a visit to the home of a sister in a neighboring city. I

FAREWELL TO OUR BABY GIRL

recall the admiring glances and to us highly gratifying comments of fellow-travellers, evidently good judges on points of excellence in babyhood; the curious investigation and final, unqualified approval of our "find" by relatives and friends; the heavy-hung Christmas tree, the jollity in which her ladyship occasionally joined, the fine indifference she maintained toward all the presents lavished upon her, all except a rubber rattlebox, an afterthought of one of the guests.

.

I recall the joy in our household of faith (faith being the substance of things hoped for) when the well-nigh sightless grandma, by the sense of touch, discovered the first tooth. One evening Ada's mother ran to meet me and, well-nigh breathless with the unwonted exertion, clung to my arm for support. "What is it?" I asked, alarmed, yet reassured by the glad light in her eye.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

The answer came, between gasps, "Oh, nothing in particular, only I thought you might be glad to know baby has a tooth!"

.

Another change of scene, and I am looking for the first time on our baby in short clothes — a little surprise planned by the mother. Underneath my smile was a sense of loss for which I had not yet prepared myself. My cuddling baby had left us never to return, and a little girl — or a substantial promise of one — had been left in her stead.

"Well," I exclaimed, my thought soon finding relief in words, "good-bye, baby darling; and thank God for the little girl who is to take her place!" And then we both wiped tears from our eyes and silently sat down to supper.

.

I have n't even referred to the first word spoken by our baby girl! The repression

FAREWELL TO OUR BABY GIRL

has not been without effort, as you shall see. When first we distinguished the heathenish word "Pa-ba" we were not sure that it meant anything; but later, on sight of me or my picture, her dainty mouth would purse, and "Pa-ba" would come from her lips with explosive force. All too soon the "b" gave way to "p."

Ada was slow in learning to talk. Her dialect and her aboriginal way of giving names of her own to persons, animals, and objects afforded us much amusement, and gave us many a suggestion as to the origin and growth of language. Let me give those interested in child talk a few illustrations.

In her animal world, dog was "boo", a small dog "tee-boo." To indicate the word horse she simply clucked. She crowed to imitate a cock and brayed (with surprising likeness) in imitation of a donkey. Her cow was "ooah" in imitation of the bellowing of

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

a neighbor's Jersey. She called the boy who brings us milk the "ooah boy," and the milk wagon which passes our door was "ooah buggy." Her birds were "peeps" because of the continual peeping of the sparrows under our roof. Determined to oust the squatter sparrows from their favorite corner and so relieve the wrens that nested in a tin can among the woodbine over our porch, and scientifically curious to test the well-known persistency of the sparrow, for thirty-one days in almost continuous succession I pulled down their re-made nest. The little girl resented the intrusion of the sparrows, and every evening on my return she would run out to meet me, and with wild-eyed indignation exclaim: "Papa, peep ba nat! peep ba nat!" meaning that the birds had again built a nest.

Her first display of jealousy was over my devotion to the evening newspaper. Con-

FAREWELL TO OUR BABY GIRL

fident that she would be forgiven the indignity, she used to come up stealthily behind her papa, and snatching it away, with a roguish smile which I could never find it in my heart to resist, would say, "No yead pappet, papa! No yead pappet!"

Her inventive mind suggested "Papa-day" as a synonym for Sunday. One winter morning she broke forth in rhyme as follows:

"Papa-day ! papa-day,
Ada wide 'er, wide 'er shay."
(Ada ride her, ride her sleigh.)

She early loved to watch the beautiful sunsets, and was wont to rush into the house and drag us to the porch to "shee de pitty shunshet."

One by one the words in our Ada's baby vocabulary are passing out of mind, and the arbitrarily chosen words we grown-ups use are taking their places. A cow is to her no

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

longer a mere bellower. The quacker is now only a duck; the brayer, a donkey; the "boo," a dog; the "mew," a cat; and so on to the end. I cannot quite bring myself to say I am glad to note her progress in this direction.



IV

THE FOND FATHER GOES AWAY FROM HOME

OCTOBER 21, 1880. — The egotism of the fondly loved man in a home the other occupants of which are women would become unbearable but for the corrective influence of "all the world and the rest of mankind." The whole world outside the home is in benevolent conspiracy against the male egotist of the household, to keep him from being spoiled by feminine adulation. The world's sympathy, support, commendation, praise, are administered with ample correctives

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

and due qualifications, healthfully checking the otherwise redundant growth of the ego and heading off the haughty spirit of the man at the head of the household before he can come dangerously near a fall. When a man of family enters his happy home, the other inmates of which are all of the feminine gender, the bent of his self-love finds no obstacle save his sense of his own unworthiness — a feeling, unless he be more than normally self-complacent, that he has somehow, weakly if not wickedly, extorted from these unsuspecting ones a priceless consideration for the small service he can render in return. Thus prodded by conscience, he usually undertakes to undeceive his lovers, only to find the over-fond ones persist in seeing him at his best, — even refusing to believe there is any worst, — insisting that his attempts at confession spring from an excess of modesty.

A slight break occurred last week in the

FATHER GOES AWAY FROM HOME

regular order of our quiet home life. I was called away for three days, and returned on Saturday. For at least a whole day prior to my going there hung over our otherwise happy home the shadow of impending woe.

"If I were superstitious," said the wife, with a sadness in her face and voice which belied her disclaimer, "I would surely think something awful was going to happen."

To me — for I am proof against all superstition (unless it be the lingering shadow still cast upon my mind by the new moon as a dispenser of good and ill luck) — to me, the self-satisfied one, it was a sweet sorrow, for I was sure there was no ground for fear. We were unusually well, and my circumstances, a few years before this somewhat straitened by losses, were steadily improving, and the chances of a railroad accident or of a stroke of lightning were as far as possible, "humanly speaking," neutralized by life insurance policies.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

On the first night after our separation, instead of sleeping the sleep of the just, I was caught by the midnight hour sentimentally sitting in my room at the hotel, writing home, my selfish purpose being to satisfy my own hungry heart; my reason, as given in the letter, being to break the spell of loneliness at home.

On my return, far as I could see, there were two white objects dancing about in front of the big window opening on the porch. It was not hard to guess what the pantomime meant. The children had seen me alight from the street-car; but as they both had colds, and a slight rain was falling, they had been prohibited from running to meet me, and were venting their glee by frantically jumping and screaming. Their cries soon brought the mother, who, also in white in honor of my home-coming, towered far above them, waving one hand and throwing kisses with the other. Another sight met my eyes.

FATHER GOES AWAY FROM HOME

In the immediate background, seen from time to time between the two miniature dancing dervishes, sat my old mother leaning far forward in her wheel-chair and vainly straining her age-bedimmed eyes to behold a glimpse of the one of all living on the earth most dear to her. Her wavy white hair stood out in the background of the picture, a crown of glory for her face — a face still beautiful to me despite the ravages of these last years.

Such a welcome awaited me! All that in times past I have childishly coveted, all that the world could have bestowed on me of wealth and honors, are to me as nothing compared with the conditions which have made possible the impossible thing of a few yesterdays ago, — such a welcome, with so much of love behind it. They say a man is a physician or a fool at forty; surely he must be a philosopher or a fool as he nears the fifties, and in the philosopher's lexicon — my lexicon

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

— there's no word so big with meaning as the little word Love.

Oh, the shoutings, smothered with kisses, the huggings so fierce as to make droll breaks in the shouting, the pulling and hauling for first place in my arms! And, standing in the background, the rose-colored walls heightening the suggestion of color in her cheeks, the light of love and of merriment dancing in her eyes, patiently waiting her turn to welcome me, was the one woman in my world most dear to me. Nor would I omit to mention the pathetically feeble embraces of the dear, doting mother. Her thin white hand slowly passed across my face and over my head, as the blind are wont to show their fondness, and from the sunken lips, between kisses and sobs of joy, came the words, "My dear boy! my dear boy!"

How they had missed me! I, so long without a home; I, who for so many years

FATHER GOES AWAY FROM HOME

was wont to go and come, with no loving heart to sadden at my going, no loving eye to brighten at my coming; I, so recently "the lone one," can hardly realize this rich fulfilment of my dream of family life, — this heaven on earth.

I am told that at the table the day following my departure, my baby girl, looking about, exclaimed, "Papa no here!" And the tears gathered in her eyes, though no words came to her lips. The mother sought to divert the mourner with the cheering announcement that to-morrow would be Thursday, and the next day Friday, and on Saturday papa would come; and the day after that would be "Papa-day." Marie's broken answer was, "Yes, mamma, but —" she found relief in a shower of tears, flew to the next room, and threw herself upon the sofa.

Another story told me is that one early evening the mother opened the piano and

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

played a polka, and Ada, as usual, proceeded to dance round the centre-table, holding up her dress at the sides, as she had seen the chorus girls perform at some *matinée*. Suddenly she stopped, and the tears burst from her eyes. Throwing herself on her knees, and burying her face in her mother's lap, she began to sob as though her heart would break.

“What ails you, darling?” asked the mother; “are you sick?”

The child's only response was, “I want papa.”

I had never dreamt — certainly since my early youth — that I could be the hero of such a tale. May the omnipotent God, who for years seemed too far off to be reached by prayer, forgive my old-time doubt as to His goodness, and help me daily to live up to the full measure of so much love!



V

A TALE OF WOE

MAY 3, 1881. — One evening, early in November, a serious trouble came into our lives. Returning home somewhat later than usual, I was quick to note the look of anxiety on the mother's face. "What is it, Mother Mary?" I asked, forcing myself to be calm.

Her only reply was, "What shall we do!" She then gave way to tears, her hands on my shoulders trembling with excitement.

Not to lengthen out the woful details, I

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

will simply state that our Ada had the whooping cough. You smile? Perhaps I am making too much of this event in our family life?

Why is it one's friends assume a superior look of unconcern and take on a smile which, to say the least, is hard to bear, when they are told your children have the whooping cough? And why do they follow up the thrust with those empty words of consolation, "They might better have it now than later?" Is it nothing to sit impotent at the bedside of a devotedly loved child and watch that pitiful look of terror in her eyes, and hear that strange, wild-animal bark, followed by that agonizing, heart-breaking wail? Is it nothing to see the fair face turn purple-red, the blue veins distended, the white of those appealing eyes grown bloodshot? Nothing to place one's hand upon the child's head, — to sustain it through the next par-

A TALE OF WOE

oxysm, — and find it burning hot ? Nothing to waken from the restless sleep of the worn watcher to find the little sufferer sitting up in bed, her back bent as with age, her shoulders rising and falling with the muscular exertion of coughing, and on the dear face an expression of unutterable anguish ? Then, when the parent's anxiety is most tense, what of the new pain which shoots through the heart as an ominous cough from the trundle-bed in the next room announces that the scourge has claimed a second victim ?

I shall not retell the story of alternating anxieties, of waning hope and growing fears, of remedies tried and abandoned, of the long heart-sickness lasting well on into the Spring, when it seemed inevitable that our Ada, if she should live — if she should live ! oh, how terrible the alternative those words presented ! — would never again be well and strong. Not until our neighbors, the squirrels and

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

the chipmunks, came out of their winter quarters, and the dandelions in the fields and by the roadsides began to turn gray, and the morning-glories began to climb the porch, usurping the place of the late-coming woodbine, — not till then did the well-nigh winter-killed flowers of our home bloom again, — the younger, stocky, with a wealth of pink and white, the older spindling and sallow, and yet with a promising suggestion of color. Now, as I write, the unmistakable bloom of youth has returned to both, and the happy days are here again.

And, too, while I write (it is early morning) the high-keyed, jubilant notes of our old neighbor "Papa Wren" fall on my ears. He is informing his friends, our children, of his belated arrival from the south. Going to the window I see "Mamma Wren" daintily inspecting her summer residence, preparatory to opening it for the season's campaign.

A TALE OF WOE

Shouts of joy from both the children at once give their bird neighbors cheery welcome. Their glad refrain, many times repeated, is: "The wrens have come!" "De wens 'a' tum!"



VI

A "COMMONPLACE" SUNDAY

MAY 15, 1881. — This has been what some might term a commonplace Sunday — as though any day at home could be commonplace! There is nothing to differentiate it in my mind from other Sundays, nothing except the fast ripening fulfilment of April's promise, which I eagerly note after a week's absence from home, — the deepening bloom of health on my children's cheeks, the annual resurrection of the flowers, and that other miracle of beauty, the velvet green of

A "COMMONPLACE" SUNDAY

fields and lawns where seemingly but yesterday all was dull yellow and gray. And I must not omit that most startling miracle of all, which in a night has transformed the stunted crab-apple trees all about us each into a burning bush, from which one might easily expect to hear God's voice as of old.

It is eight o'clock. I hear a whispered council at the head of the stairs, soon followed by the patter of descending feet. Looking up over my glasses, I see coming toward me through the dark hallway an apparition easily recognizable — two little figures in white, one nearly a head taller than the other. They come running toward me, each in friendly rivalry for the first good-night kiss. I look into their beaming eyes and devoutly thank God that through the mystery of marriage and the transcendent mystery of birth He "setteth the solitary in families."

Later I stop reading to listen to their voices

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

in unison with their mother's in the "Our Father." I can see the picture in the bedroom overhead. The little ones are kneeling at their mother's feet, their heads in her lap, their hands firmly clasping the mother's. At the close of the prayer I listen for Marie's nightly comment, "I yak dat pah" (I like that prayer), and am not disappointed. With a very good opinion of her own judgment, once having approved the words she may be relied on to retain her regard for them to the end of her days. Just why a little four-year-old should like something she does n't comprehend is more than I can discover, unless it be the succession of big words she thinks she has mastered.

Though the words of the prayer which they repeat so glibly have little meaning to them now, yet as their minds expand and their vocabulary grows, they are sure to find in them more and more of meaning. I wish they

A "COMMONPLACE" SUNDAY

might know it in the simpler and more beautiful form in which it was originally written. It is hard, if not impossible, to convey to the infant mind the full meaning of such words as "hallowed," or such phrases as "kingdom come," or the larger sense in which "our debts" is used. And, too, I have sorrowed over the words "lead us not into temptation" ever since our Ada, in one of her thoughtful moods, raised her big blue eyes to mine and said, "God would n't really and truly lead us into temptation, would He?" No, my dear one, God will not lead you into temptation; but in my own weakness, and confronted with the certainty that the protection I can give you now will become feebler and more feeble with the years, and that the end of my strength at most may come when you most need a father's protecting hand, I cry out from a full heart, "Deliver us from evil!" And yet, alas! I know that only in

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

part will my prayer be answered. With their highly strung nerves, their strong self-assertion, and — I must admit it — their inherited self-will and tendency to waywardness, God pity them when the crises come! And in the inevitable crises may their wills be only bent, not broken; and forth from their experience may they come to the full realization of the meaning of the words they utter so thoughtlessly to-night: "Thy will be done." And lurking between these words, and along with the thought of the children's earthly inheritance, comes the comforting consciousness of the reserves of goodness and all-conquering sweetness of disposition inherited from their mother, which will surely serve to protect them from the spirit of evil abroad in the world.

The only incident of this uneventful "papa-day" was our walk in the woods along the river. The little ones both affect the self-

A "COMMONPLACE" SUNDAY

reliance of the period; but I observe, with a smile which sometimes puzzles them, that whenever we come upon a strange boy or man armed with a fish-pole or gun, or whenever a strange dog or cow looks up at them from some unexpected covert, two little hands, one lean and long, the other fat and chubby, grasp mine tightly. But when there is a hill to climb or to descend, or a log or plank across a stream inviting them to venture, the hands squirm from their prison and the two are off with a shout which announces the reestablishment of their belief in their own daring.

The mother, temporarily struggling with housework in the absence of the kitchen maid, was too tired to accompany us to-day. Her absence suggested, as the direct purpose of our walk, the picking of a bouquet for her. It proved to be a simple affair, — a few belated wood violets, with an abundance of sweet-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

williams and wild strawberry blossoms ; but the desire to make the absent one happy sanctified it. The bouquet now occupies the mother's best vase and is sure to adorn our breakfast table to-morrow.

I rejoice in the thought that both the little ones are supremely happy in the woods, delighting beyond measure in the annual resurrection of the grasses and flowers, and taking keenest interest in every detail of Nature's plan for the perpetuation of her own pleasuring. My most vivid recollection of the walk is of the little flower-gatherers bending over some half-concealed violet, Marie exclaiming again and again, " You pity ting ! You pity ting ! " and Ada, in the densest portion of the woods by the river, feeling her way along the narrow cow-path, carefully pushing aside and holding the brush that it might not fly back and hurt her little ward. As she thus stood, her body slightly bent, her arms spread

A "COMMONPLACE" SUNDAY

out, she looked up at me and, smiling, said, "We all like the woods, don't we, papa?" And then she added, regretfully, "If mamma was only here!"

Their day closed with a lunch in grandma's room, the table a tray in grandma's lap. To the dear old lady, so shut out from the world by partial blindness and deafness and the other infirmities incident to her years, this young life continually hovering about her, oftentimes startling her with its rough touch, is a daily blessing and inspiration. When they were gone, and we two — mother and son — sat in the dark, communicating chiefly by touch of hands, occasionally by word of mouth, she broke the silence with the words, "I don't see why my life is spared so long, unless it be to give the dear girls life-long memories of the helplessness of age — memories that will make them better women by enlarging the bounds of their sympathy."

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

And then, as if she had uttered some word that might seem to undervalue their worth, she added, "Not that they need anything to make them better, the dear girls!"



VII

“ON’Y POOTY DOOD”

MAY 26, 1881. — The day is cool and bright. The girlies are running across the field, each alternately the pursuer and the pursued. Their apparently purposeless sport — all the more enjoyable to them because unpremeditated and not bound by rules — is a delight ; for I clearly see that it is part of the divine plan to redden their cheeks, strengthen their limbs, expand their lungs, and enlarge their capacity — not only to endure but also to enjoy. While they are coming into their own out of doors I am sitting by the grate

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

fire thinking unutterable thoughts. The queen of the home has left her subjects in my charge, her expectation being that in her absence I will guard them from all harm, not only from outside causes, but also, and chiefly, from themselves. I am expected to arbitrate the differences certain to arise, for it must needs be that offences come. I am expected — mildly, very mildly — to personate Woe in the discipline of the offender. I confess I am somewhat of a failure, or a fraud, in the role of arbiter. I accept the responsibility only to quiet the mother's misgivings. I will further confess that when out from under the mild tyranny of the mother's confidence in me I usually let the contestants fight it out, secretly entertaining the belief that a set-to now and then is an essential to their all-around development.

This leads me to make further acknowledgment. Were my Mary to read the pages I

“ON’Y POOTY DOOD”

have written, her criticism would surely be that I had embarrassingly idealized her, and that I had pictured the children as little angels, instead of the self-centred, high-tempered, perverse, naughty, but altogether lovable children they really are. I can see some force in the criticism — as to the children — and shall proceed forthwith to mend my ways, remarking in self-exculpation that when the girls are most angelic it is then I feel my inspiration to write about them. While I would not conceal the earthly side of their natures, I would not deliberately advertise their failings. If they had n’t from time to time revealed to me their angel side, I would never have begun this record. The fact is, these interesting wards of ours, fresh from heaven as they are, have somehow, in their few years of contact with earth, acquired so much of the common stock of what the theologians suggestively term original sin, and the profane with equal

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

suggestiveness call deviltry, that, but for our complacent recollection of our own innocent childhood, we might find refuge in heredity — the latter-day method of accounting for the unaccountable. Sometimes a look or a word half recalls that shadowy past when mamma and papa walked their separate ways. But a flood of later recollection drowns the thought, and we take refuge in the less discomfoting conclusion that our heaven-sent offspring are simply impressionable, and when our neighbors' children do anything audacious, out of the common, or positively bad, they at once proceed to emulate the example. Neighbors' children are so convenient when parents would find a way of escape from the humiliating philosophy of heredity !

Our feelings have so many times been hurt, and our sensibilities have so often been shocked, by these darling earth-born angels of ours, that we have virtually accepted without

“ON’Y POOTY DOOD”

further question Jack Downing’s beatitude :
“Blessed are they that expect nothing, for
they shall not be disappointed.”

There ! they ’re at it again ! A moment ago, looking out of the window, I saw Ada affectionately hugging and kissing Marie, and heard her exclaim, “You dear little thing, you !” And Marie, the self-conscious Marie, blushing responded with her favorite term of endearment, “ ’Ou ’weet ting, ’ou !” But that was a moment ago. How changed the situation now ! These angels of the household are actually dealing to each other dead-earnest, flat-hand blows ! A stinging one on Ada’s ear brings the disgraceful set-to to a sudden close. The injured party informs the aggressor that she will forthwith take an appeal to papa — her court of last resort !

I sink into my chair and await the appearance of the parties to the suit. Ada rushes

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

into the room, her face red, — one side redder than the other, — her eyes filled with tears, her voice trembling with indignation. Standing in the presence of the judge, but without aught of reverence for the authority invoked, she gives me a tragic look of insistence, which plainly declares that now, if ever, the family personator of justice should get in his work, and in a voice as strident as that of an angry bluejay she cries out :

“ Papa, Marie slapped me on the ear — see ! and I want you to punish her ! ”

I evasively resume my book.

She stamps her feet with rage and exclaims : “ Papa, do you hear what I say ? Marie slapped me on the ear, and I want you to give her a good whipping ! ”

Marie, who has followed her sister into the house, concluding she will not contest rushes out of doors and down the street.

To gain time, I make a weak attempt to

“ON’Y POOTY DOOD”

divert the plaintiff — and to my surprise succeed. I calmly remark that I will take up the case a little later, and suggest that, meantime, I will let her decide whether, on her mother’s return, we shall go to the park and hear the band play, or —

I am not permitted to name my alternative, for, like a flash, the indignant look gives way to an expression of delight. She turns on her heel, rushes out of doors, and when last seen from the porch is shouting to her wayward sister, “Marie, Marie! We’re going to the park! We’re going to the park!”

Marie, already sorry for her sin, and glad to forgive herself and forget the past, joins in the glad cry, “We’re doin’ to de pahk! We’re doin’ to de pahk!”

And so once again I weakly evade my responsibility, and the threatening cloud of woe proves to be big with blessings on the offenders’ heads!

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

When Marie rushes out to meet her mamma, the mother asks her if she has been a good girl. She blushingly looks up into the face bending over her and innocently answers :

“ On’y pooty dood, mamma, on’y pooty dood.”



VIII

ALMOST BUCOLIC

JUNE 3, 1881. — I am lingering in my too comfortable chair long after every one else is sound asleep. What for? That I may tell the simple story of an uneventful evening at home.

The fierce wind storm of last night hurled to the ground the larger of the dead limbs which had long hung from the great elms in our back yard. These I sawed and split and hauled to the woodshed and piled up for winter use, — the children watching me with as much of wonder as I should feel were I to stand watch over an Edison at his work!

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

On my way back to the house I stopped and looked long and wonderingly at the glory of the setting sun, — first a mass of molten gold, then a brilliant crimson, and then a royal purple fringed with crimson — a poem in colors. After drinking my fill of joy from this inexhaustible source I turned again to the little house we lovingly call home. My attention was compelled by an unruly woodbine with which I am trying to cover the nakedness of a hickory tree killed by lightning one night last summer. Next I proceeded to follow the latest neighborly advice as to what should be done with the young elms recently planted on the street in front of the house. Next I turned the hose on the thirsty lawn, to the delight of the little ones, who always have great fun running under the stream.

The “wun” is suddenly brought to a close this time by Marie’s inherited tendency to

ALMOST BUCOLIC

take what the insurance men term extra hazardous risks. The venturesome little one comes nearer and nearer to the nozzle, until, my attention momentarily called elsewhere, her forehead encounters the full force of the stream, and she runs screaming and dripping wet to tell her mother the story of her undoing. After convincing the victim of my absent-mindedness, that I "did n't mean to do it," I resume my tasks.

This is one of my physically ambitious evenings, and as they are not of frequent occurrence, I am making haste to embody it in the record. I proceed to wire a young elm to a stalwart butternut tree, that its wayward tendency may be overcome in its youth. The rest of the long twilight is given to the task of uprooting plantain, ragweed, thistles, dandelions, and milkweed from the ground back of the barn, leaving the hollyhocks and sunflowers in all their glory of pink and purple

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

and gold, delightful reminders of dooryards and roadsides in my memory of early childhood.

On my way to the house, my allotted tasks completed, I again stop to look into the west, this time with its gathering gloom, and, by some law of association which I cannot trace, I find myself recalling other summers when heated pavements and the stone walls of huge office buildings shut me out from contact with the cooling earth and from sight of sunset skies.

The gleeful laughter of the children comes to my ears from the bathroom overhead. I recall the keen race of the little ones, a half-hour ago, for the first good-night kiss, the radiance of those beaming eyes, and the bloom on the not over-clean faces. The dreary brick-and-stone age of my past is forgotten in the joy of the present. The high-keyed good-night of the one and the cooing "dood-

ALMOST BUCOLIC

night " of the other, with the glorious going-down of the sure-returning sun, draw from my lips again and again the glad refrain which, alas, too seldom comes from the heart of age :

" God 's in His heaven :
All 's right with the world ! "

I come in and tell my tale of joy to the grandmother sitting in the dark, in her usual waiting attitude — waiting just now for the treasured few words from her son before retiring for the night.

" Now I will tell my story," said she, when I had finished mine. " I sat by the window looking out on nothing, and thinking over again the thought that comes to me and stays with me so much, and dreading the — well, never mind what — when of a sudden I felt myself seized and there was a vigorous climbing into my lap, and soon the two girls had my

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

head between their hands and were smothering me with kisses. And then into my poor deaf ears came the words, 'Good-night, gran'-ma,' and their echo, 'Dood-night, dwan'ma.' Now don't you ever tell me they're naughty children, for I know better. They're God's angels sent me in the loneliness of these last years to cheer and warm my old heart while I wait."

And all the while the clamor of children's voices continues. After the splashing of water in the bath-tub, with many an "oo" and "ugh" and much laughter, come the usual protests against getting out of the bath and against the application of the rough towels. Then comes the "pitty paer" (pretty prayer), the "Our Father," and then the hugs and kisses, — "Just one more, mamma," — and that oft repeated. Then down the stairs comes slowly the madonna of the bath-tub, worn with the recent exertion, and yet in the

ALMOST BUCOLIC

light — turned on in her honor — looking the picture of self-complacent motherliness. With a tired smile on her face she says :

“ Could you hear my lovers making love to me ? Though they nearly wear me out every night, yet how could I live without them ? I’m so glad they’re affectionate ; are n’t you ? ”

Not waiting for my perfunctory yes, she continues, “ If they were n’t I suppose I’d go right on loving them and doing for them ; but you don’t know how much easier it is to wear myself out for them when in the midst of my hardest tasks Ada says, ‘ You dear, good mamma, you ! ’ or Marie, ‘ ‘Ou ’weer ting, ’ou ! ’ ”



IX

STILL BUCOLIC — ALMOST

JUNE 4, 1881. — As is our wont, we accept our Marie's invitation and "do down to de wibbah and wo tone in de watah" (go down to the river and throw stones in the water). Our river walk is signalized this time by a huge bouquet of syringas that fill the whole house with their pungent odor, drowning the delicate fragrance of the velvet roses blooming in our dooryard.

After our wonted rapture over the long slanting shadows of the trees on the water and the river of gold flowing between the

shadows, I return to my unfinished task, the sawing of dead limbs from the trees in our dooryard. I look down upon the up-turned and admiring faces of my girls. Marie's expressive eyes plainly say : "That papa of mine is simply wonderful ; he can do all sorts of impossible things ! Look at him !"

Dear credulous one, she little suspects how impotent her father feels as he measures his meagre attainments by the standard of his youthful ambitions !

To gain time and recover my breath I climb down the step-ladder, and, seated on one of the lower steps, fan in hand, I arrange a foot-race between the two, one to run one way round the house, the other the other way. I can see by the twinkle in Ada's eyes that she has a fit of generosity and intends to let Marie win.

"One, two, three," and they are off. Soon they appear on opposite sides of the house,

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

their faces flushed, their mouths open, and with as much of a giggle proceeding therefrom as their well-nigh exhausted wind can sustain. Nearer and nearer they come, the little one with her strong limbs, deep chest, and tremendous will, making it far from easy for the long-limbed runner to come in a good second — as she had planned. As they rush into my arms, almost causing the step-ladder to collapse, the giggle breaks out into a laugh and a gasp, both claiming their reward — Marie the victor's hug and kiss, and Ada the consolation kiss and hug.

There is a slam of the stiff-sprunged screen-door, and the madonna appears upon the scene, blessing it with her smile. After a patient hearing of each version of the race, she gives the anticipated invitation, "Come, children, it's bedtime."

Without a word of protest, for both are in an amiable mood to-night, the tired ones

STILL BUCOLIC — ALMOST

give me their good-night kisses, and hand in hand with the mother pass out of my day's life, leaving me wondering how long this ideal obedience will last.

An angry cry from the bathroom all too soon gives me my answer.



X

SUNDAY MORNING AT HOME — A FRAGMENT

JUNE 26, 1881. — I sit in my easy-chair, ostensibly writing a note, but in fact taking a mental picture of the group near the window. The mother, in loose white morning gown, is sitting in a low chair leaning forward and reading the words from a collection of songs for children. Ada is sitting in her little rocking-chair wriggling and twisting, as is her wont when she is intensely in earnest. Marie stands leaning against her mother, stolidly looking at the song-book upside down,

SUNDAY MORNING AT HOME

with her index finger identifying the angels ("engles"), the flowers ("wowers"), the birds ("buddies"), and the trees ("twees"), as the mother alternately reads and sings. Then they join their leader in the first couplet of the song. The mother gives me a hopeless glance, but heroically continues, line upon line, trying to keep up the children's illusion that they are singing in time and tune!

In actual fact, Marie's voice tends to a low monotone, and Ada's is high-keyed and quavering. My hope that the girls would be found to have inherited some measure of their mother's gift of song is finding little encouragement, for, like their father before them, their keen enjoyment of music is coupled with a tantalizing inability to reproduce the niceties of time and tune. But assured by the early experiences of the mother, who denies the possession of any gift save that of persever-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

ance, I am not without hope that each will waken some morning to find a work of grace has been performed—that her voice, like her soul, is moved with concord of sweet sounds.



XI

AN EVENING WITH THE ANIMALS IN THE PARK

JUNE 30, 1881.—Instead of going home at the usual hour this evening I took the car for the park, where by appointment I was to meet the wife and children. Arriving on the ground first, I threw myself upon the grass and gave myself up to reflection. My thoughts were drifting back to the old days, when the solitude of parks wooed me only to disappoint me. The rumbling of a car cut short my musings. Looking up, I saw two little bare heads and two pairs of bare arms posed cherub-like in the car win-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

dow, the madonna craning her neck to get a glimpse of me. I had thought to let the girls hunt for me a while ; but, on the moment, with boyish impulsiveness, I rushed across the rustic foot-bridge and down to the gate to claim my kisses and to relieve the burden-bearer of her baskets.

The cherubs were earthily hungry. We proceeded at once to take possession of a lunch-table and chairs, and were soon literally in full enjoyment of the material portion of our improvised picnic. Supper over, we gathered up the fragments and fed the animals, the children wild with enjoyment of the novel occupation. They took especial delight in a young stag, in whose big soft brown eyes I thought I saw the pathos of his race — its tragic fate to be overmuch admired of men, and therefore, strange logic, the more relentlessly hunted down ! But the children found more to interest them in the 'coons,

AN EVENING WITH THE ANIMALS

with their almost human hands held out palm upwards, and with their all too human look of greed. The timid rabbits made faces at us, and retreated to their dens. The foxes smelt cadaverous and were quarrelsome, and Marie strongly objected to their "mell." We found the squirrels prosperous and sleepy, content to sit in their respective holes and blink at us. The young black eagles, recently imported from the Oregon woods, were pitifully spiritless, tame as the chickens in the keeper's dooryard. The prairie dogs amused the children with their short-distance runs and their solemn observations. Sitting on their haunches, they stretched their bodies to their full height, as if ambitious to see the world and be in it yet not of it. But the raccoons proved to be the chief attraction. In the story of the picnic given her grandma on our return Marie said:

"I yaked (liked) de pwaiwie dogs an' de

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

woxes an' de 'tag wid de bid yorns, an' de bid buddies in de bid tage; but de bestest of all was de tunnin' 'ittle toons. Dey had yans yak 'ittle dirls' yans, an' dey eat dest yak 'ittle dirls eat, feedin' desselves wid deir own yans — an' widout any bib on, eider."

This last was evidently intended as a joke, for it was followed with laughter so loud as to compel her grandma to disconnect her speaking tube.



XII

FOURTH OF JULY—A TRYING INCIDENT ON THE RIVER

JULY 4, 1881. — The muffled rub-a-dub-dub of giant firecrackers exploding in a barrel just across the street awakened us at about five o'clock this morning. A moment later two little night-gowned girls were dancing in front of the bay-window downstairs, excitedly gesticulating to the big boy across the street to whom we were indebted for the startling eye-opener. Long before breakfast time our front dooryard was littered with the red and gray remains of myriad firecrackers

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

which the mother had bought in anticipation of "the day we celebrate" — or rather, the day we used to celebrate. Ada's hands, cheeks, and lips were black with powder. Marie was bewailing a burned and blackened thumb and forefinger — bewailing, yet none the less eagerly watching her wonderful sister, and her yet more wonderful father, whose feats at arms commanded her unstinted admiration.

The long-sustained excitement before breaking her fast was too much for our Ada. The child grew so cross after breakfast that her less sensitive sister declared there was "no yibin' (living) wid 'er." Recalling my favorite boy-and-man remedy for tantrums, I suggested a row on the river as an escape from the further distractions of the day. What a change in Ada's face! The drooping eyelids lifted, the dull eyes lighted, the pouting lips curved with smiles, and the color

FOURTH OF JULY

came back to her cheeks. A moment later she was on my lap, hysterically kissing me and saying over and over again the child-word for pleasurable anticipation, "Goody, goody, goody!"

Marie was ready for anything, but bashfully intimated that she would like to have me invite the afore-mentioned big boy to go along with us. The suggestion brought back to Ada's face the frown presaging wrath, followed by the solemn declaration that if Jimmie Murray had to go just to please Marie he might go, but she 'd stay home and play with grandma; she had "no use for Jimmie" and would n't even tolerate him.

Delivered of her ultimatum, she walked on ahead and awaited results. Of course she carried her point.

Jimmie Murray, not knowing what he 'd lost, and therefore not robbed at all, walked with us down to the boat-house to give us a

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

send-off. He chose to walk by Ada's side, and the two were close behind me. I listened for the inevitable explosion; but, somehow, the inevitable did not happen. As Jimmie gave our boat the final push, Ada, seated close behind me, remarked in undertone :

“ Papa, if you want to row back and get Jimmie I won't mind; there's plenty of room on this seat by me.”

I smiled — not outwardly, for I knew the child was in no frame of mind to bear ridicule. Instead of meekly availing myself of the gracious permission I blundered into the ill-fitting role of disciplinarian. Partly turning my head, I said :

“ No, my dear; I planned this boat-ride hoping to make my Ada happy once more, and I would n't think of taking any one she so thoroughly dislikes.”

The irony sank deep — too deep. The un-

FOURTH OF JULY

gracious look came back to the child's face, — I knew it without turning round, — and in a spiteful undertone she retorted :

“But, papa, you don't understand ; I did n't want him to come, but I — but I — ” The sentence was broken by a flood of tears.

The innocent cause of this fresh outburst called out from the shore, “What's the matter, Ada ? ”

Ada answered by girlishly turning her back to him.

Meantime, Marie and the mother, seated in the stern of the boat, were intently watching the antics of a swarm of water-bugs flitting and circling over the surface of the water along the shore.

“What dey do dat wor (for) ? ” inquired Marie, referring to their lightning-like ins and outs.

In default of a better answer the mother

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

said, "I don't know, dear, — just for fun, I guess."

The infant philosopher thought a moment, and then offered her solution of the question: "I dess dey want to mate us tink dey's vewy busy doin' tings for deir mammas!"

Soon we rounded the river bend and found protection from the sun's fierce glare in the shade of the giant elms along the shore. The cooling shade and the welcome silence brought repose to the perturbed spirit behind me.

At Ada's request I rowed toward a densely wooded island. Soon the boat's prow sank into the black mud, and we alighted. The children were charmed and somewhat awed by the strange stillness — relieved only by the shrill alarm of a kingfisher in the top of a huge elm whose branches stretched far out over the water. They were startled, and brought to a standstill, by a red squirrel star-

FOURTH OF JULY

ing at them from the middle of a cow-path leading from the water's edge to the covert. Rallying, the children, hand in hand, advanced upon the adversary. The squirrel, quick to note the change of front, turned and ran up a tree. From a crotch of a tall hickory he watched our every movement with a persistency that seemed to embarrass the children.

Ada, recalling the story of Robinson Crusoe, and in no wise ambitious for an island experience, expressed a lively fear lest our boat should float off and leave us without so much as a match to start a fire with or a cookie to eat.

Marie said she did n't care, and threw herself down upon a bunch of tall, thin, pale-green grass underlaid with mud, exclaiming, "I'd dust yak to yib yere."

Ada's motherly solicitude here asserted itself. She grabbed Marie by both hands and

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

lifted her to her feet, exclaiming, "Mamma, look at Marie's span-clean dress! It's a sight to behold!"

And sure enough, Marie's skirt behind looked as though a crude attempt had been made to sketch in charcoal a half-moon, with a raw edge of mountain peaks and canyons! The child blushed at her indiscretion and declared she wanted to "do wight yome an' dit on a tean dess."

To satisfy her we started down the river. A delightfully refreshing breeze mitigated the almost noonday heat of the sun. A sudden gust of wind lifted Ada's sailor-hat from her head and then passed on, letting the hat fall flat upon the surface of the water.

Quicker than I can tell what happened, the excitable child uttered an exclamation of agony, and, bending far out over the side of the boat, reached for the truant hat. In doing so she lost her balance, and with a scream of

FOURTH OF JULY

terror on her lips fell headlong into the water. In a moment I caught the folds of her dress, and in the next I held her in my arms. The mother, always equal to an emergency, coolly steadied me in the rocking boat while I held the child's head slightly downwards, that the water might pass from her nostrils and mouth.

All trace of color had fled from our Ada's face; her lips were pale and there was no soul in her half-opened eyes.

"Does her heart beat? Feel! feel!" I exclaimed excitedly.

Oh, that look of anguish as the mother felt for the life of her child!

"I can't tell," was the only response, and the words fell shiveringly from tightly compressed lips.

I sank to the seat with my precious burden. Holding the child on my knees, face downward, I too felt for the life which the pale face and staring eyes seemed to deny me.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Not daring to trust my first impression I waited in an agony of suspense, keeping my anxious eyes well averted from the mother's inquiring gaze. As I waited Marie's piteous wail fell on my ears, adding intensity to my agony.

Yes, the heart was beating faintly, with now and then a strange flutter ; but it was beating. I could not trust myself to speak the words for which the mother waited, but instead I looked her full in the face and smiled.

"Thank God ! thank God !" came from between her firmly set teeth ; and then, with enforced calmness, the mother said, "Let me hold my darling and win her back to life."

I placed the limp form in the arms eagerly held out to receive the precious burden, and thus freed put forth all my reserve of strength to reach the landing.

The half-opened eyes slowly closed ; the lips moved ; a suggestion of color came back

FOURTH OF JULY

to them. Then the eyelids were raised, and instead of the vacant stare the blue orbs gave a look of puzzled inquiry. The lips moved again — this time with an effort to speak. The mother's quick ear caught the low whispered word, "Mamma."

"Yes, darling, mamma's here, and holding you in her arms."

"Mamma, I'm cold."

"Yes, dear, I know it; but papa's rowing with all his might, and we'll soon be home."

"Papa!"

Never had the word sounded so sweet to my ears. Never till then had I fully realized how precious that little life had become to me — what a hold our first-born had upon my heart.

"Yes, dear," I responded, still pulling on the oars.

"How did I get so wet?"

Almost breathless from excitement and

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

the exertion of rowing, I answered, "The wind blew your hat into the river—you tried to reach it—you leaned over too far—and—"

Ada suddenly rose to a sitting posture, and turning upon me made this characteristic inquiry, giving satisfactory evidence of her complete return to earth: "Papa, did you row off and leave my hat in the water? I believe you did."

Here the mother came to my relief with, "Ada, your dear father was too busy saving your life to give your hat even a moment's thought. I promise you another and better one as soon as I can go down street."

By that time we had reached the landing. I bore the shivering child up the hill, across the field, and to her cosy little room upstairs, overlooking the river that had so nearly claimed her as its own.

That was twelve hours ago. As I write

FOURTH OF JULY

the record of this never-to-be-forgotten event in my heart-life the object of our solicitude is sleeping soundly in the next room, her regular breathing a gratifying reassurance that all is well with her.



XIII

WE TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR

AUGUST 16, 1881. — Children's day at the State Fair, and a children's day it was for us! Of course we took a lunch-box, for a lunch under a tree with myriad novel sights and sounds about us is no small part of the fun. After emptying the capacious box of its sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, cake, macaroons, peaches, plums, pears, and bananas, the children demanded ice-cream! We yielded to the pressure and adjourned to the nearest booth, where they partook of suspiciously blue-white cream, pronouncing

TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR

it good, while we drank black coffee on which the milk produced no other effect than to impart a grayish tint thereto. This *we* pronounced good! I mention the instance to illustrate the mood in which visitors should always approach the ordeal of a lunch in a booth at a fair.

The live things on exhibition attracted us first. On our way to the stables Marie compelled us to halt and observe two melancholy monkeys performing on a carpet-covered box in front of one of the show tents. The performance over, the older monkey maternally took the younger one across her knee and seriously resumed her task — that of removing fleas from its fur. Marie wanted to know if she was doing that to make “wun.” Ada, scornfully turning on her sister, exclaimed, “Does the mamma monkey look as though she was doing it for fun? Come on; I’ve seen enough of that.”

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

We turned aside to see the poultry. Ada, in all seriousness, wanted to know why the roosters all began crowing when they saw us coming. When told there were so many of them that there was a salute for everybody, she wondered how they arranged to take turns at it! Marie could scarcely keep her fingers out of the cages — until a big Plymouth Rock rooster fiercely pecked at her. She jerked back, turned pale and then red, her two dimples revealing her embarrassment. After that she held her mother's hand tightly, evincing no further desire to experiment. Ada had a way of wandering off, but always keeping some one of us in view. Once she came running back, with the wonder look in her eyes, and —

“What do you think I saw, papa? I saw a hen lay an egg! She did n't lay it down, either; she just dropped it! And then she clucked and went on eating as though noth-

TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR

ing 'd happened ! And then a lady came along and reached in and put the egg in her basket. I peeked in and saw she had her basket 'most full. What time is it now, papa ? ”

I told her it was ten minutes past two o'clock.

She thought a while and then came at me again with, “ I wonder if two o'clock is n't the time when the hens lays their eggs ? ”

She had thus early grasped the modern idea of “ system ” in business !

Marie studied the ducks and geese, but at a safe distance, and finally in an undertone confided to her sister her discovery that they looked just like the ducks and geese in Ada's First Reader. Ada, with the half-scornful, half-patronizing air of one who has attended fairs before, asked her sister how she 'spected them to be if not like those in the book.

Marie, objecting to the question as irrelevant and immaterial, declined to answer, mov-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

ing on to other objects of interest, which happened to be the sheep.

A man was seen shearing — or rather barbering — an enormous ram, evidently to make him more presentable. Marie wondered if the operation hurt him. Ada remarked that the beast looked as contented as her papa did one time when she saw him in a barber's chair having his hair cut.

In an inclosure between the sheds was a herd of Angora goats. Here Marie got even with her knowing sister. Her mother had already given her a five-minute lecture on goats when Ada, arriving on the ground, ventured to remark that she liked these sheep better than the others because they were cleaner and had such funny whiskers. Marie turned on her with, "Don't you know doats from yEEP?" and the triumphant look on her face removed all evidence of her recent humiliation.

TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR

Ada developed much interest in the Jerseys in the stable beyond. She came toward me and in an undertone said: "Papa, ask the man why he does n't take off those blankets when the weather is so hot." The man overheard the question and with patronizing good-nature laconically answered, "Fleas."

Marie had missed her afternoon nap. Bulls and goats began to look alike to her. So we cut short our general sight-seeing and started in the direction of the grand-stand.

On a platform in front of "The Mysteries of Paris" stood on exhibition, wrapped in tawdry robes, three hideously be-painted and be-frizzled females. "Papa," said Ada, in all seriousness, "did you hear the man call those ladies beauties?"

I answered "Yes," and moved on to buy my grand-stand tickets. Later, Ada's hand slipped into mine, and regardless of the lapse of time, the child began where she

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

left off, with "But, papa, do *you* call them beauties?"

I answered "No."

She looked relieved, and added, "I don't see what right the man had to call 'em beauties, then, do you?"

I meekly remarked that the man's say-so did n't make it so.

As we mounted the stairs I faintly heard her inquiry, "Why not, papa?"

Poor unsuspecting child! How much of skepticism, otherwise called worldly wisdom, one must acquire simply in self-defence!

We had hardly taken our seats in the grand-stand before Ada's wants began to make themselves felt. Alas, "the double-jointed, humpbacked California peanuts" proved to be no better than those she had bought from the peanut man on the corner near our home. The "ice-cold lemonade" turned out to be almost cool!

TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR

Then came the all-compelling score-card man with his lingo: "The names, the numbers, the color of the horses, the color of the drivers, the owners of the horses, — a complete encyclopædia of the races, — all for ten cents. You can't keep the run of the races without 'em."

The man's eloquence, coupled with his benevolent regard for our enjoyment of the races, commanded Ada's respect and admiration, and she recommended that I invest. I told her I drew the line on score-cards.

"But, papa, did n't you hear the man say you could n't get along without one? And see, he has n't more 'n three or four left."

With that same superior air with which she communicates wisdom to her little sister, I looked down on her in her innocence and said, "My dear, the man is trying to make

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

us think we can't get along without his score-cards; but I find it easier to live without them than with them."

Another seed of skepticism thus found lodgment in the child's mind, in some cranny in which it may lie undisturbed for years. What will be its flowering in that future which is our constant fear and hope? May all this sorry planting of unfaith be followed in due time by the richer flowering of faith in whatsoever things are true!

The antics of the roustabout athletes made the children laugh uproariously. Ada wondered why the clown in baggy trousers did n't get mad at the man in pink tights who pushed and cuffed and threw him about so unmercifully.

"Oh, that 's only in fun," I explained.

Not satisfied, she persisted, "But, papa, it hurts just the same." Her inward look informed me that she was recalling the

TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR

consequences of certain "wunny" plays in which her sister was wont to indulge.

Then came the wonderful family of ground and lofty tumblers — two men, a big girl, and a little boy, all attired in bronze-colored tights. The apparently reckless way in which the men tossed the little fellow back and forth between them terrorized the children, until I explained to them the uses of the big net underneath their base of operations. Ada whispered her desire to play that with me sometime. Marie said, "I no yak dat," and turned her back on the whole performance.

With nothing but people to look at, Marie's inclination to sleep returned. Her eyelids finally refused to remain apart, and curling up on the bench with her head in her mother's lap, she went off into slumber-land. Thereafter the shouts of men interested in the races and the calls of the vendors made no impres-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

sion on her. A half-hour later, some earth-call which we did not hear suddenly brought her back to us. Opening her big blue eyes she gave the regulation "where-am-I" look, which was soon followed by smiling glances of recognition. In a few minutes she was one of us again, and as usual, clamoring for the unattainable — in this instance a "dint o' water."

The children took almost no interest in the races, though their parents became mildly excited over a spirited pacing race, — spirited because the judge had substituted a disinterested driver for one who had shown himself too interested to win the two previous heats.

Ada filed with me a protest which didn't reach the judge's ear. It was real mean, she thought, for the drivers to sit on the horses' tails. When one of the drivers mercilessly plied the lash to his horse's side she was wildly indignant, and declared she would go

TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR

home if he did that again. When told that was the way the man had of informing his horse that he was expected to go just a little faster, she indignantly replied :

“ The horse knew that before the man whipped him ; could n’t he see as well as the man could, that he ’d have to go faster or else he ’d get beat ? ”

Being no horseman, and being in full sympathy with the horse, I abandoned any special plea for the man and tacitly admitted that the child’s foolishness might be wiser than the driver’s wisdom.

But the crowning exhibition of the afternoon was that given by the female lion-tamer. Ada was shocked that two big men would “ stand there and let a lady go into that cage alone.” “ Why did n’t *they* go in ? Suppose the lion should bite her hand off ! There ! see him grab the stick in her hand ! Next he ’ll have her arm in his mouth ! ”

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

And then she screamed. When she saw everybody looking at her and smiling, her eyes filled with tears and, her face in her mother's lap, she gave way to violent sobbing. When finally the madame stepped down and out of the cage, and the doors were closed on the beast, Ada looked up through her tears and whispered to her mother, "I'm glad she's out, anyway, and I guess she is too!" Marie assumed a superior air and said to her sister, "I knowed the yady 'd det out all wight."

The crowd surged toward the several exits. Soon we found ourselves packed into a street car. A kind-hearted Hebrew held Marie on his lap and vainly tried to engage her in conversation. After supper we each gave grandma an account of our individual experiences during the day. When bedtime came, grandma said to the children, "I've been to the fair, too." This enigmatical

TAKE THE CHILDREN TO THE FAIR

remark compelled a labored explanation, for it was not easy to make the children comprehend just how it was possible for grandma to go and yet not go, to see and yet not see; another of life's lessons, one which only the aged are content to learn.



XIV

ADA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

AUGUST 22, 1881. — The event has occurred, and we are rapidly recovering! Ada has had her long dreamt-of and much talked-of party in celebration of her sixth birthday. The precedent of birthday parties was established early in the child's society life, the one limitation put upon them being that the number of her invited guests should not exceed the number of her years on earth. This year, however, we made an exception to the rule as to numbers, in favor of a boy in the neighborhood who could not

ADA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

be ignored, and the consequence of this single exception was a final list of seventeen guests — and no “regrets.”

Returning home at five to assist in entertaining, I found my new green-painted wheelbarrow the object of general admiration. I innocently offered to give the littlest girl of the party a ride around the house, and she promptly accepted. On my way home I had puzzled my brain to invent some novel way of contributing to the gayety of the occasion. My trial trip around the house settled the question! After I had made the seventeenth trip with my wheelbarrow I threw myself upon the grass panting and perspiring with the unwonted exercise; but my two hopefuls, with that injured look which carries all before it, mercilessly insisted that they had n't yet had their turn; and so I made the record nineteen! I then took advantage of the age limit and retired

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

from active service, content to watch the fun, and if necessary, keep the peace.

The children sampled all the games; played with all the toys; by turns ridiculed, and then occupied our girls' piano-box play-house under the walnut tree in the back yard; ransacked the barn, their shouts wildly alarming the horse in the box-stall; played drop-the-handkerchief in the same old shy way we used to play it more than a half-century ago; and finally played hide-and-seek — which game we used to call "Hi Spy," the "H" doubtless being part of our inheritance from English ancestors. In due time the gracious presence of the mother dawned upon the little folks, and the silence which followed was broken by her welcome invitation, "Come, children, come to the dining-room."

What a scampering! What eager, expectant looks! As they filed in and saw the profusion of flowers, and the marvellously

ADA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

wrought centre-piece, the dazzling array of silver, cut glass, and decorated china, — mainly relics of our wedding, now nearly nine years past, — there was a general “Oh!” — the exclamation more or less subdued by cultivation until almost lost on the tongue of the oldest girl. Ada and Marie looked round in triumph, the self-complacent smile of their faces plainly saying, “I knew it would surprise you.”

There was an appalling calm — the calm preceding the storm! The look on every face said, “What next?” I went about from one to another, propping up the smaller boys and girls with choice quartos from my library. Then came the several courses, one after another in quick succession, and yet too slow to satisfy those play-sharpened appetites. Our guests were not long in reaching the hilarious period which comes to normal diners-out — we older ones more or less

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

successfully controlling the impulse to be jolly, the degree of success depending on the occasion. When the stuffing period neared its close the mistress of ceremonies changed the key by bringing in a platter of startlingly variegated ice-cream. The small boys shouted, the girls giggled, and — to cut my long story short — the feast ended in a swirl of good-fellowship.

As I watched the minority representation of my own sex, I indulged in the reflection that boys of five and six and boys of fifty and sixty are not so far apart, after all. A glass or two of wine administered to the old boys on occasion effectually bridges the canyon between youth and age.

A game of fox-and-geese, indulged in by the boys after dinner, made the party too much of a neighborhood affair to suit the girls. Most of the boys strayed so far that they forgot to return and pay their adieux to

ADA'S BIRTHDAY PARTY

their hostess. The big girl of the party was last to go, remarking to Ada that she had had "a perfectly lovely time."

When calm was restored, forgetting the slight the boys had unthinkingly put upon her, our six-year-old came up to me and with wild rolling of the eyes exclaimed, "Papa, I *never* had such a good time!" And then, to make it more emphatic, she added, "Never, never in all my born days!"

I asked her where she found the expression "in all my born days!"

Her answer was, "I won't be sure, papa, but I think I heard you use it once."

I could only say, "I think you are mistaken."

After a minute of silence Ada called to her mother and said, "O mamma, I wish I could be seven very soon!"

Just how old are we when we cease to wish that time would move faster?



XV

TRYING TO TOUCH BOTTOM

SEPTEMBER 5, 1881. — Labor Day with its enforced rest has given me a quiet half-day at home. To-morrow, our eldest having graduated from the kindergarten and said good-bye to all its pretty and helpfully suggestive make-believes, will enter upon the serious business of childhood and youth, — and I might as well add, the serious business of life, for at no time will her education really cease until her life shall end, and possibly not then.

Why all this serious business of education? Why not flee to the woods or to the prairie

TRYING TO TOUCH BOTTOM

or "as a bird, to the mountain," and escape the strain? In exceptional moods I can only answer, "Why not?" But ordinarily it is quite enough for me to recognize the innate desire of the child and the man to know, not simply the lore of fields and woods and hills, but also the learning of the schools; to possess ourselves of as much as we can use of the rich legacy of the past; to utilize this legacy for present ends and pass it on with interest to those who shall come after us; to sit down with the kings and queens and princes and princesses in the realm of mind, who from "the gray dawn of the world" till our own full-orbed day have ruled and governed men and blessed them — to sit down with them at the feast of books, their inspired and inspiring utterances, and even their simple presence, dignifying and enriching life and giving to finite minds soul-lifting glimpses of the Infinite.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

How much of hard struggle and glad attainment is included in this long career on which our first-born will to-morrow so eagerly enter! Even before the preliminary course — her education in the schools — shall have been completed, I may have been matriculated into I know not what of discipline and growth. But whenever the transfer of activities shall occur, I trust I may find comfort in the thought which gives me comfort now: that this soul of mine, this entity recognizable here, shall live on and on, and shall grow more and more into the stature and likeness of Him whose we are and whose impress we bear. The immortality we have in our children is an ever-present comfort, and not without its assurance, — or at least the suggestion, indefinite though it be, — of our existence beyond the grave. The immortality of a parent in his children is a miracle actually demonstrated before our

TRYING TO TOUCH BOTTOM

eyes. Who dare say there are no miracles
save those our mortal visions include and our
finite minds can grasp? Be that as it may,
it is at least worth much to be

“Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence.”



XVI

THE GRANDMA'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

FEBRUARY 11, 1882. — Before my memory of the event is dulled by time, I want to put upon paper some record of yesterday — a red-letter day in our home. It was nothing less than the beloved grandmother's eightieth birthday. At first reluctant because of her physical weakness and infirmities, she finally yielded to the importunity of the daughter and granddaughters, and consented to receive her friends — "if alive and well."

GRANDMA'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

The girlies became very much wrought up over the anticipated event, and many were the disputes between them as to the part which each should play. It was finally agreed — the mother being the arbitrator — that Ada should open the door and say to the ladies, "Please walk upstairs and turn to the left," and Marie was to stand behind her sister and see that no one escaped without the instruction. Later, Marie was to pass the sugar, and Ada the spoons and olives.

The day and the hour came. It found the grandmother uncommonly free from aches and pains, and as happy as the children in anticipation of the event. The first arrival was the only man whom she had honored with an invitation — the poet of the occasion. He had come early to give the girls a cutter ride; but so thoroughly aroused was the social instinct in these embryo women, that while at any other time they would have been delighted

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

to ride, Ada blushinglly declined, saying she must stay and tend door, and Marie said, "Me, too."

Soon the other guests arrived, singly and in pairs, Ada anticipating their coming by shyly peeping out of the door. As they entered she received them with all the seriousness and solemnity of an English maid. With unconscious grace she waved them upstairs, Marie standing behind her bewildered and speechless.

The fond father in the background noted the look of pleased surprise on the faces of the guests, on finding themselves coached by two such bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked girls. The older, as became her tawny complexion, was attired in a red dress of soft, clinging wool; the younger wore a white dress starched almost painfully stiff, with a blue sash about her waist and black silk stockings tightly fitting her plump legs. They coolly

GRANDMA'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

took the compliments showered upon them as a matter of course, as much as to say, "My present business is to look and behave my prettiest; but I thank you for mentioning it." May they both preserve to the last their present immunity from the amiably administered poison of flattery.

Events in the parlors and dining-room frequently attracted Marie; but Ada, more conscientious, would have remained at her post, like the overworked Roman sentinel at Pompeii, though the house had become engulfed in a cyclone of cinders.

A pleasurable sight met the visitors' gaze as they descended the stairs. In the east end of the parlor sat the grandmother in her wheel-chair, serenity embodied,—her pale, thin, wrinkled face beautified by a smile which told the story of her heart's content and of her joy in the presence of her friends on this day of days so happily crowning her

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

long life. The excitement of the occasion had given a faint suggestion of color to her cheeks, a sparkle to her eyes, and a quaintly humorous glibness to her tongue. Her wavy white hair, a veritable crown of glory, was partially covered by a dainty white cap, — of the kind Queen Victoria affected, — the birthday gift of her daughter. Her wheel-chair raised her slightly above the rest; and as she sat receiving the congratulations of her friends, her modest queenliness was the subject of much comment (which because of deafness she could not hear), — the queenliness which womanhood attains when age crowns the brow and its lines give added dignity to the countenance. On the mantel behind her chair were vases of white and red roses; the sitting-room table was transformed into a bed of roses — red, pink, and white, with a background of carnations, hyacinths, and potted plants. For every

GRANDMA'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

guest the venerable hostess had a pleasant word of thanks and good cheer, and her quick-witted responses drew forth many a hearty laugh.

After an hour devoted to greetings I spoke a few words of welcome. At the suggestion of a friend I briefly outlined my mother's career, her care-free girl life, her early bereavement in the death of her beloved father, her early marriage, her trials as child-wife and mother, her losses and afflictions, her long widowhood, the close bond of union between mother and son, the loving care the wife had given her during these last years, and, too, the coming of the children into her heart and life, lengthening and brightening her days. I then asked a dear friend to read mother's favorite poem, "Crossing the Bar," for I dared not trust myself to read it. As the affecting words fell on our ears many of us wept.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

I then invited the poet to read the lines he had written in honor of the occasion. The thought embodied in the poem is so beautiful and fitting that I will close this memory by giving it in full :

“Oh, the moon so old shines on, shines on,
As it shone in the years gone by ;
And the stars are as bright as they were the night
They were set in the azure sky.

“The violet blossoms are just as blue,
And the lilies divinely fair,
And the rose as red, though the year be dead,
As the roses of Eden were.

“The sound of the music it never dies,
Though the strings of the harp be still.
Some far-off day, in its own sweet way,
Some soul with the sound will thrill.

“The look, the smile, of a tender face,
However the years go on,
In the heart's blue sky they will never die,
Nor the spell of their love be gone.

GRANDMA'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

“Wait on, dear soul, for the world is fair,
And the sky in your heart is blue,
And the smiles and tears of the other years
They will ever come back to you.”



XVII

IN A REMINISCENT MOOD — OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

DECEMBER 4, 1882. — Ten years ago to-day my Mary and I were married. I was happy then, but I am happier now. Then I only hoped for the best ; now my heart emphatically informs me that “the best is yet to be.” Ominous shadows were cast upon our courtship, but nothing so unsubstantial as shadows could have deterred us from the step we had chosen to take. As we had first timidly dared to hope, and later had confidently trusted, the clouds we so much

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

dreaded at the outset rolled away, my only present fear being that freedom from woes may invite some new disaster. But nothing can rob us of our confidence in the future as between ourselves; for as our little woes have brought us closer together in spirit, so great sorrows or losses, if they come, must make us more completely one. Of another thing I can speak with equal certainty. During these ten years there has never been a moment when my heart has felt a single pang of regret; and I am equally sure that Mary's simpler, more transparent nature would have revealed by word or look any question in her mind, had there been any, as to the wisdom of her heart's promptings. And, too, I have it from her own lips on this day of days that, far from feeling jealous of my past, she is supremely thankful for the woes and sorrows which brought us by separate and devious ways out into the "goodly land."

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Ten years ago! I cannot say, as Mary does, "It seems but yesterday." Too much of heart history has been written since that day.

It was a quiet home wedding. A death in Mary's family had compelled a radical change of plan. While I deplored the reason for the change and sympathized with Mary in her desire to live up to the traditions of the family and have a church wedding, yet inwardly, and selfishly, I was more than satisfied that only the two families and our intimate friends were to be present.

I cannot remember much that was said and done on the evening of the wedding, but I vividly recall our meeting after the day's separation.

"You can see Mary now," said the mistress of ceremonies. I recall the flutter of expectancy with which I ascended the stairs and knocked at her door. In response

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

to the word "Come," I eagerly entered, and there she stood, arrayed in white, in front of the long mirror in the centre of the room, her hands extended toward me, her countenance beaming.

I was about to fold her in my arms, when she exclaimed, "Careful, dear; you'll crush my lace." Then noting my disappointment, she added, "But there's no reason why you should n't kiss me if you want to."

"Want to!" I exclaimed, kissing her again and again.

Mary would hardly have been called a beautiful bride, and yet to me she was "divinely tall, divinely fair"; and, as my best friend later remarked, her face, at other times the serenest he had ever seen, was fairly radiant that night. And this despite the lines which early illness and later cares had written upon her forehead. Far from quarrelling with these lines, I, who am many

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

years her senior, feel kindly toward them, for they and all for which they stand have helped to bridge the gulf of years between us.

I cannot refrain from repeating a remark of my friend, and Mary's former pastor, soon after the ceremony that made us one to the world, as for months we had been to each other. Said he to me, "You look as though old things had passed away and all things had become new."

A dear old lady asked me what had become of the solemn face I'd been carrying about with me for so many years. Another stimulated my vanity by telling me I looked ten years younger than when she last saw me. I will confess to an extreme sensitiveness, at the time, on this subject of age. To show the intensity of this feeling, I've hunted up in our public library a bit of my verse, sentimentally presented to Mary ten years ago to-day, and afterwards published over other initials

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

than mine in one of our minor magazines.
The lines read thus:

“I long had thought my race was nearly run !

But no, that is not so !

My life began when I thy fond heart won —

Less than a year ago !

“ They tell me, Mary, I am growing old !

Ah no, that cannot be !

Though hair grow gray, the heart can ne'er grow
cold

Companioning with thee ! ”

I'm surer of the truth than I am of the poetry of these lines, but they will serve my present purpose fairly well, illustrating the frame of mind in which I went to my fate.

But how did it come about — this wedding of which I have been writing ? Here was a lone man of forty-seven who had had his day in court and been somewhat worsted, and yet was apparently free from ambition to

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

move for a new trial; there in her home almost across the way from my suite of rooms was a woman who long had passed her thirtieth birthday, and yet, to all appearances, was fancy-free, though rumor had persistently gabbled about an old engagement, which had preserved her from ardent wooers during the susceptible years.

This man — that is, myself — and this woman — Mary — had often met, and as it afterwards turned out, had dreamed each of the other; but in waking hours neither one had given the other a serious thought. To the young woman the middle-aged man had been a sort of hero, — a hero with weak spots in his armor, — at best unattainable, and at worst undesirable. To the middle-aged man the maiden of thirty seemed reserved for some better fate than he could offer, and yet she strangely held possession of his thoughts. Her smile as she looked up from her flower-

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

bed or her book, her voice as she sang to him from the church choir on Sundays, or as her laugh rang in his ears on his way past her home, — these were among his pleasantest memories. And yet it had never occurred to her that she could be anything to him, nor to him that he could ever win her from her maiden meditation.

It seemed to be one of those gentle decrees of Fate which keep the world loyal to the fickle dame — despite the apparent fact that the law of averages proves her more cruel than kind — that we two should, each unknown to the other, join an excursion party which was to spend nearly a month travelling in the far West. When the two met at the rendezvous in a great hotel in a western metropolis there was only a faint stirring of the masculine heart, the super-conscious thought being, “Now I know I shall have a good time.”

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Relatives and mutual friends on the trip made the way to intimacy delightfully easy. We came together first through human — very human — sympathy, hunger having overtaken us. Three times a day thereafter we came together eating and drinking. Together we climbed mountains and descended into mines. We read from the same book at the same time — a dangerous practice. We read aloud to each other, a scarcely less dangerous practice. We sat together in the same sleeping-car section for hours at a time. We varied the delightful monotony of the journey by sitting together on the platform steps.

Our first real awakening was in Colorado. We had planned a drive through the Garden of the Gods, and somehow I missed my opportunity to obtain a seat in the carriage beside her. Her regretful smile told me her story, and my drawn face revealed to her my disappointment. I was about to say or do some-

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

thing silly when I caught the restraining eye which said to me, as if in so many words, "I'm as sorry as you are, but we have no mutual rights which others are bound to respect."

I went away sorrowing, joining another party to which I vainly tried to make myself agreeable.

By a happy circumstance, which I felt sure was Fate, we met again near the entrance to the Garden of the Gods, and a gentleman of her party asked me if I would exchange seats with him. Would I? I looked into his eyes, thinking he might have guessed my heart's desire; but they gave no hint of indirection. I eagerly accommodated him.

Ah, that ride! It was through a veritable garden of the gods. To me it was also a glorious garden of sleep, for a new and delightful dream had taken possession of my bewildered brain. While others with curious

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

interest commented on the strange likenesses to animals which the red rocks presented, I was watching the varying expression on the face opposite me and wondering what it all meant to me.

This is in no sense a diary. I therefore omit the details of the long ride by rail over gray-white sands; through stunted forests where trees grow from crevices in rocks and from between great boulders; past Indian villages where human beings swarm like ants but lack the ant's intelligent purpose and mind-directed industry; past homes, and whole cities, pink and red with roses; past miles of irrigated small-fruit ranches and other miles of land where the orange blossoms bloom.

My recollections of San Diego are grouped about one supreme moment—or was it a half-hour? We stood on the bayward side of Coronado Beach. The crescent moon, all too rapidly descending, had made for

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

itself a glorious pathway of gold across the rough waters of the bay. Faint notes of music reached our ears from a small steamer far out on the bay; and nearer, at irregular intervals, the thunderous boom of the surf against the rocks, followed by the angry swish of the defeated and retreating waves, gave to the scene of beauty a solemn grandeur, awing us to silence. Tears came to my eyes, illogical tears, the meaning of which I could not even guess. I turned my head far enough to see that Mary, too, was deeply moved. Her arm, firmly held in mine, began to tremble. I pressed it still more tightly, and we resumed our walk. No word had been spoken, and yet our hearts had held solemn converse.

Later we found ourselves seated in a ball-room watching the dancers; but a strange silence had come upon us. It was, as I now clearly see, the silence following the full

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

awakening of two hearts to the call of destiny.

At Monterey there was another moment worth recalling. Seated in the midst of one of nature's most gorgeous flower-gardens, under the far-spreading branches of a giant live-oak, we vainly tried to hide our hearts behind feeble questions and answers as to the names and habits of flowers and trees and birds. Nothing but the shortness of the time since the beginning of our intimacy deterred me from then and there pouring into her ear the story she waited to hear, yet dared not anticipate.

Our party occupied adjoining rooms in the great hotel at San Francisco. By another of those seeming accidents which govern our lives, we two met in one of the corridors late one night, each waiting for the other members of the party to return from the theatre. While we sat looking over the rail-

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

ing into the court below, recounting the experiences of the day, a bell-boy interrupted us with the embarrassing inquiry, "Are you the gentleman and lady in 347?" That was the room in front of which we chanced to be seated. I greatly admired the womanly dignity with which Mary turned on the boy and answered, "No"; nor did I fail to observe the faint blush on her face as we resumed our broken conversation.

At Sacramento our party visited the capitol, where all went well with us until a gentleman who piloted us about the building stopped to relate to Mary and a few others the history of some portrait on the wall. Seeing me standing near, he turned to Mary and said, "Perhaps your husband would be interested," pointing to me. This was too much. Her self-possession deserted her. Blushing and hysterically laughing, she stammered, "He is not my husband."

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

The stranger's apology was spoiled by his too knowing smile, and matters were not helped by the rest of the party, who called to me and explained the unintentional joke at our expense.

At Nevada City, California, we took seats in the narrow chute that took us down many hundred feet into a gold mine. I have a faint recollection that the air was hot and the walls and floors were dripping, and that we were glad to return to the upper world; but I distinctly recall the thrill of delight with which I felt Mary's hands grasp my arms as we dropped down into that seemingly bottomless pit. For the moment the plain, unpicturesque man of affairs felt himself a knight of high degree, and, like the knight of old romance, enjoyed himself immensely.

I recall the sandy beach near Salt Lake City as the scene of the only attack of jealousy ever caused by my Mary's conduct. I

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

had counted on the afternoon with her, and when I found her seated in the carriage on the way to the beach with a gentleman she had known in the East, and when she passed me in her bathing suit and gave one hand to a relative and the other to this friend, I became supremely wretched. After a few moments spent in the water I dressed myself and took a seat on the wharf, vainly striving the while to divert my mind from this new cause of woe.

Thereafter I was continually made conscious of an omnipresent uncle, tardily aroused to the duty and necessity of asserting himself and protecting his charge.

The condition became unbearable. I determined to know the worst. Resuming our eastward journey, I watched my opportunity. The conscientious relative lay snoring in his stateroom. Mary and a friend sat on the platform watching the majestic scenery of the

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Sierras and chatting gayly, as though scenery were little or nothing to them. They invited me to sit, and made a place for me at their feet. Soon the friend found it convenient to go into the car, promising to return in a moment. The moment lengthened into hours.

Whether it was the altitude or some injunction put upon her by her uncle I know not; but I found Mary strangely nervous, sensitively alert, timidly evasive, and, now that she was alone with me, abnormally observant of every detail of the scenery. Concluding that nothing could be gained by siege, I nerved myself for an assault, and when a sharp turn threw her slightly forward I caught her hand in mine and uttered the words :

“ Mary, do you think you could ever love me well enough to become my wife ? ”

Our eyes met. She gave me a startled

OUR COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

look, such as the deer gives when the wind brings suggestion of danger, and, her voice trembling with suppressed emotion, said :

“ Can it be you really want me — me — to become your wife ? ”

I assured her that that was my heart's desire. Her hand-grasp tightened, and in low voice, close to my ear, she gave me the coveted answer :

“ I dare not trust myself to say more now than that I do not guess — I know I love you — love you now — have loved you ever since we looked out on the bay that moonlight night on Coronado Beach.”

And so we were wedded — heart to heart, for all time, and, as we trust, for eternity too. Most men are able to name the time and place when and where the fateful words were spoken. Most wives take a sentimental interest in the locality — the identical spot where

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

“he proposed.” But Mary and I are denied that satisfaction. We can only tell our friends that at some time in the afternoon of a certain May day in that year of grace, 1872, somewhere on the heights between Ogden and Denver, our perturbed spirits found repose.

We mean to make the trip again some day and point out to our daughters, as nearly as we can, the spot where the words were said that meant so much to us.



XVIII

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER 26, 1882. — I cannot let another Christmastime pass into uncertain memory without including in my record an outline picture of what the day has come to mean to our little ones — and their elders too.

As inevitable as the knowledge of good and evil, comes to children the truth about Santa Claus. It had come to our Ada. One of her playmates recently informed her that there was "no really and truly Santa Claus," and that her father and mother were the

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

actual gift-bringers-in-chief. While the revelation disturbed her at first, her imagination soon surrounded the fact, enveloping both it and the myth with a comfortable mantle of compromise; and now she talks with Marie about Santa Claus with a knowing twinkle in her eye, which says: "You are not yet old enough to comprehend the mystery; when you are you shall know all; meantime I shall continue to speak of Santa Claus as a real personage."

For several days the delivery wagon had been leaving packages at our door. These were handled and examined by Marie with almost painful curiosity; by Ada with a complacent sense of possession and an abnormal willingness to bide her time. This difference is one of temperament, not of age. From her first conception of Christmas it was so with Ada, and every succeeding holiday season strengthens the child's insistence that

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

no packages shall be opened until Christmas eve, and none shall be exhibited until Christmas morning.

Late Christmas eve the children went to bed with eager anticipation of the morrow — Ada gladly; Marie reluctantly, almost tearfully.

Then came the gathering of boxes which had been concealed in closets and drawers, and of little parcels from the top of the upright piano and the upper shelves of the several book-cases. We three older children evinced not a little curiosity; but the most eager of the three was the grandmother, dull of sight and hearing and infirm of limb, but — aside from a delightful suggestion of childishness as to present-making and present-receiving, and a grandmotherly tendency to excuse the children and resent our feeble attempts at disciplining them — as clear of mind as ever; and, too, possessed of a keen sense

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

of humor and a rich fund of old-fashioned common sense, on which the rest of us, with all our uncommon sense, are wont to draw. Usually asleep by ten o'clock, she was wide-awake now. She must see and handle every present, and read and comment on every accompanying card or note. Had there been time, she would have insisted on opening every package with her own hands. Every gift evoked from the wife and the mother its appropriate exclamation, such as "Just like her!" "The dear woman!" "Think of it! every stitch taken by her own dear hands!" "And to think she should have remembered our children, with all her own little ones to do for!" "Just what I wanted!" "How these will delight the children!" etc.

It was my task to open the larger boxes, clear away the rubbish, set up the tree in the front room — we have no parlor set apart as

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

such, for all our rooms are literally parlors. It remained for the wife to trim the tree with chains of cranberries and popcorn strung by the children, and with dazzling gewgaws suggesting gems of prodigious size and sparkle. The presents were then labelled and hung, the heavier and more bulky ones piled around the tree on the floor. After a free interchange of opinion as to the general effect, the adult members of the family self-satisfiedly retired for the night.

Soon after five on Christmas morning we were simultaneously aroused by a shrill whisper from the larger of the trundle-beds. "Good morning, mamma! Good morning, papa! Wish you Merry Christmas! I've been waiting ever so long for you to wake up."

The whispered salutation and the responses in undertone awakened Marie; and, less conscientious and calculating than her sister, before her eyes were fairly opened she

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

shouted, "Mawnin', mamma! Mawnin', papa! Wut uh muhwy Kuppa!"

There was an unwontedly early appearance of the entire family, the grandmother included, in the big living-room below stairs.

The first objects of interest were the black stockings hanging from above the fireplace. Out of Ada's projected a wine-colored silk umbrella — so far that it had almost fallen out. This so nearly filled the child's eye and heart that scant attention was paid to the minor presents. A doll's parasol, bright red, made Marie's happiness so nearly complete that, like her sister, she gave the remaining contents of her stocking scarcely more than a passing glance. I wonder if all children are so constituted? I am sure my childish likings were never so exclusive. And yet I remember my ecstasy over the first sled I could call my own.

But these presents were only an appetizer

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

for the feast which was to follow. After a light breakfast — the children were too excited to eat much — mamma entered the mysteriously closed and darkened front room, followed by papa, who hastily shut the sliding doors behind him. One lighted the candles on the tree while the other tacked blankets over the windows to further darken the room. Mamma lingered long, rearranging the presents on and about the tree. Papa, having heard suspicious whisperings, followed by loud thumps on the door, appeared on the scene to preserve order. Ada stood patiently waiting for the doors to be thrown open, her eyes dancing with eager anticipation. Marie had made several attempts to push open the sliding doors, but Ada had restrained her. She then tried to peek between the cracks, her more conscientious sister chiding her with such epithets as “naughty Marie,” to all of which the offender was painfully indifferent.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Finally the doors were thrown open, and with shouts of delight the children rushed in, quickly followed by the fond father and the grandmother in her wheel-chair, the maid from the kitchen bringing up the rear. It happened to be a disappointingly small tree — so small I had to stand it up on a rug-covered soap-box to give it passable dignity; but to the little ones it was big enough, or, as Marie put it, “dut wight” (just right). The first fierce exclamations of delight were followed by a calm of perfect bliss, as one after another in quick succession the presents were passed to their respective owners and by them examined.

Ada's one disappointment was that there was a doll for Marie but none for her. Now Ada is preëminently a doll-girl — feminine through and through, with maternal instincts remarkably well developed — abnormally developed, Marie thinks. She seems most of

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

the time to be living solely for her Laura. She offers up hours of her day a willing — yes, glad — sacrifice to her Laura's comfort and education. She has her dolly wash-days, ironing days, mending days, and reception days. From morning till night, when she is confined indoors, she is dressing and undressing her dolls, or giving them carriage rides or street-car rides, or holding tea-parties or receptions for their pleasure. That the word Duty is given a prominent place in Ada's vocabulary is evident from the conscientious attention she pays to her first doll, the now aged and frayed Pauline — a big, dirty-gray rag-doll, the right hemisphere of whose massive, rickety brain protrudes upward much farther than the left. All that seems to remain of Ada's regard for Pauline is compassion, mixed with a sense of responsibility. But toward Laura, the latest addition to her family, goes forth nearly all the devotion she can spare from her mother.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

But I have wandered from my story. And here let me say that the friends who may chance to read this simple tale of home life and children's ways will, I am sure, attribute the vagaries of the writer as revealed in these pages to the natural garrulity of advancing years and a pardonable egotism which assumes that the happiness of one's own home, — his little world, — and the traits and doings of the dear ones who make up that world, must surely interest everybody else. I have somehow come to regard the world as divided into two classes, — namely, those who have and those who have not the child-life in their homes. Of the small number who may read these fragmentary memoirs, possibly none will read them with more of interest than certain friends I have in mind, whose parent hearts have of necessity been warmed at other hearth-fires than their own.

There came forth from one package a

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

beautiful quarto volume of stories in prose and verse, illustrated with full-page pictures in colors, the reading-matter framed in delicately traced borders and these broken on every page with fine pen-drawings by some deft hand moved to its task by a genuine child-heart and directed by an eye that had caught the grace of childhood. These dainty drawings in black and white attracted the children more than the pictures in colors, and held them longer. I wonder if this is not unusual?

Every evening for weeks to come, while I am at ease and glancing over the newspapers of the day, my Marie will lug the new book from its place, and planting it on my lap, herself on the hassock at my feet, will issue her mandate — always with the same form, or formlessness, of words: “Papa no wead de papah mo; papa wead Mawie towy!” And I, thoroughly domesticated animal that I

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

am, will dutifully lay my paper down and give myself up to the delightful duty of interpreting this book, written for eight-year-olds, fitting the stories to the small vocabulary and smaller mental calibre of my four-year-old. And her sister will lay aside her dolls and stand looking over my arm, and with patronizing air will watch the effect of the story as it finds lodgment in Marie's mind. Now and then Ada will mildly interrupt the reader to inform him that Marie does n't get the full meaning of some word he has used.

Again I digress! A pasteboard box deposited in Ada's lap contains an ideal village, and with her building material spread out before her on the floor, the child is taking her first lesson in landscape architecture. In a few minutes we are invited to behold a miracle: a beautiful village, with the regulation church, school-house, hotel, general store and post-office, court-house and jail, a public

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

park and a moderate assortment of trees ; the ground plan a copy of the regulation western cross-roads " city " — minus the saloon. Marie tries to duplicate her sister's success, and of course fails, after seriously straining the mortices in the rough attempt at joinery.

More to Marie's taste is a stuffed white bear. Soon she has the animal astride our Maltese kitten, its forelegs holding it in place, the kitten tamely submitting to the indignity, with a tired look which says, " Anything to amuse."

But I must not continue the story of gifts received. They came from east, west, north, and south, with no end of love, and most of them with delightful disregard of actual utility and adaptability.

Scarcely had the first interest in the presents subsided when a ring at the door-bell announced the coming of our one guest.

Hers was a gracious presence, bringing

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

with it a benediction on our home. Her bright eyes and fresh young face belied the suggestion of age conveyed by her silvery hair. Her coming had been preceded by a box of pink and white roses, their delicate fragrance filling the whole house with a suggestion of summer. Not content with this mark of regard, the lady with the crown of glory on her head comes laden with packages for the little ones. Soon I find myself on my knees before a "Robber Kitten," whose scattered anatomy I am expected to put together that Marie may see how it is done. Next I am teaching Ada the twist of the wrist by which the rings are thrown over the pins in the game of ring-toss.

At the height of our enjoyment a sad accident happened. Ada was standing in her little rocking-chair, trying to reach a present on the mantel, when the chair began to wobble. The child lost her balance and

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

instinctively clutched her grandmother, who was standing near. The dear old lady, just recovering from a cruel fall, and scarcely able to stand alone, lost her uncertain balance, tottered, and fell heavily to the floor, her lame hip striking first. Losing consciousness, she was borne to a couch. Her mind soon resumed its wonted action. She begged us not to let her accident mar our pleasure, but her pale face with its strained look, and her half-repressed groans made a resumption of gayety impossible. The vacant place at the dinner table, the disappointment of the children over grandma's inability to keep her word and dance with them round the "kippa tee" (Christmas tree), grandma's oft-expressed sorrow over the gloom her mishap had cast upon the festivities, coupled with the actual pain she bore, together toned down the high spirits with which we all had entered upon the day.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

When evening came, the grandmother, with firm insistence, made us carry out the rest of our plan for the day ; and so, after the pleasure-worn children had been tucked into bed, we two went to the theatre. Now an evening at the play is an event with us. Time was when the theatre, next to the library, was my chief refuge from myself. Many a time have I turned from business and politics and the discussion of public questions to some play or opera, that I might rob Sorrow of the evening hour she claimed with me ; and often in the midst of the general applause her quietly insistent voice would reach my ears above the tumult, claiming her hour.

This evening we were treated to a sumptuous presentation of "Midsummer-Night's Dream" — a fantasy that wholly fitted our mood. Then, too, the humor of the play appealed to all that was left of the boy in me. Like Puck,

HOW WE SPENT ONE CHRISTMAS

“Those things do best please me
That befall preposterously.”

As we sat laughing at the absurdities of the clowns, or breathlessly following the rapid movement of the scenes, smiling pityingly at the sad plight of the infatuated lovers, and childishly rejoicing over the happy outcome, — the breaking of the spell which had bound the lovers for a time to hard conditions, — an undercurrent of memory carried my mind back to a fantasy which once ruled my mind and dominated my every act.

When at last the curtain was rung down, the “palpably gross play” having thoroughly “beguiled the heavy gait of night,” I woke with a start from my bewildering dream, rejoicing with a full heart in the flesh-and-blood reality that clung to my arm as we crowded our way out of the playhouse and into the outside world.



XIX

AGAIN REMINISCENT — OUR HONEYMOON ABROAD

DECEMBER 5, 1883. — 1.00 A. M.
Our wedding anniversary dinner last evening having put far from me for the time the gift of sleep, I will endeavor to utilize my wakefulness by taking up the story of eleven years ago, and carrying it on into that other world of romance half satirically termed "the honeymoon." Ours was no traditional thirty-days honeymoon, "applied," as Blount quaintly says, "to those married persons who love well at first and decline in affection

afterwards." As a matter of record ours lasted nearly a year, and as a matter of fact it is n't over yet.

We lingered longest in the Rhine country, —that land of enchantment, where nothing is commonplace, no human being devoid of human interest; and, though many moons have waxed and waned since then, the delightfully mysterious spell of German moonshine is upon us still, as our friends who read these lines may have surmised.

My *Wanderjahr*, like my happiness, came late; but I am sure the young man in the twenties who long ago responded to my name in college chapel could not in the same length of time have witnessed and enjoyed as much of Old-World scenery and life as came within the range of my delighted vision on this long-deferred pilgrimage through the Fatherland—with Mary as my guide.

Through my Mary's wondering, all includ-

ing eyes, I literally saw double. With her infectious enthusiasm my enjoyment was increased many fold. Despite the inevitable annoyances and discomforts of Old-World travel and ways of living, our stay abroad was, on the whole, one long-drawn-out delight. If I dare say it in the presence of the dear home life about me, and in justice to the little darlings asleep upstairs, this was pre-eminently the romance period of my life.

To be alone with Mary in the solitude of mid-ocean; with her to thread the intricacies of strange cities or gaze upon rare scenes of natural beauty; to converse together in our own tongue and, as we fondly imagined, with never a listener who could even guess our meaning; to kneel together in historic cathedrals, accommodating ourselves with infantile awkwardness to strange ceremonies and almost unknown tongues; together to view the art treasures of London's famous galleries,

OUR HONEYMOON ABROAD

confessing one to the other in solemn undertone the awful sin of ignorance, and momentarily breathing aloud, one to the other, heretical opinions as to much of the art of the old masters; together to pierce the solemn shadows of Antwerp's soul-satisfying cathedral and there stand in the presence of Rubens's genius; side by side to stand at the topmost point of outlook in one of the towers of Cologne's cathedral and there look down upon the historic city and the lower Rhine; together to sit on the steamer's canopied deck, tracing with memory's—and Baedeker's—aid the course of Bulwer's love-sick "Pilgrims of the Rhine" and Longfellow's scarcely less romantic journeyings and courtship in "Hyperion"; together to look up through a shower of rain at poor dismantled Rheinfels and literally to feel the lightning as it shakes the castle's crumbling walls; together to pass through that very home of

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

mediæval chivalry between Coblenz and Bingen; to roam together after nightfall through the narrow streets of Bingen, and at midnight to sit at our hotel window listening to the weird whistling of the wind and the uncanny flapping of sails, our imagination picturing the whole goblin under-life of the Rhine astir in the blackness of darkness beyond the pale lights of the landing; to stroll together along the terrace of Heidelberg's noble ruin and there re-read its story of mediæval loves and hates and mad ambitions; together to climb the Königstuhl looming far above the castle, and on the tower crowning its summit to wait hopefully for the clouds to lift, and then to be rewarded with a view, the recollection of which will make pleasurable for all time the bare mention of the Neckar, the Rhine, the Odenwald, and the Black Forest—to go on thus together through these unknown yet well-known regions, in full en-

OUR HONEYMOON ABROAD

joyment of health and strength and the ambition to see and know and do, never wearying of each other, ever thinking of each other's comfort and enjoyment, daily drinking great draughts from the fountain of youth, ever storing the memory with sights and sounds and incidents and events, to the enrichment of our whole after-life — that was a honeymoon well worth waiting for. Whatever of woe or loss may come to us in after years, of this priceless possession we are sure.



XX

THE HUMOR OF IT

MY mind refuses to be content with this mere generalization of a journey which meant so much to us. Making the most of the privilege accorded those who have passed on into the reminiscent period, I am going to put down somewhat more in detail the impressions which are most insistent, paying little regard to their sequence or relative importance.

Reference has been made to Rubens's masterpiece in Antwerp's cathedral. To be frank with the reader, there rises before me

THE HUMOR OF IT

now, with far more vividness than the immortal "Descent from the Cross," a living picture of a haggard, wild-eyed, weather-worn sailor whom we chanced to see kneeling upon the cathedral floor vainly trying to pray. A sacristan came to his relief. Still kneeling, the sailor gesticulated wildly, tragically shaking his head, and in Belgian French declaring that all hope for him was gone — forever gone. The church official soothingly stroked the man's shoulder, and with comforting reassurance in his voice and face said *au revoir*, hastily departing. He soon returned with a venerable priest in tow. The priest in a few whispered words put new hope and courage into the mariner's shipwrecked soul. He led the way to one of the cathedral chapels, the man following with a grim smile on his haggard face which told of a lifted burden.

Presto! I am looking down upon the

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Rhine at Cologne and sighing for the castle-crowned hills to the south. I am childishly glad the city still maintains her mediæval Bridge of Boats, for it kindly bridges the years, leading me back to my schoolboy days, when, with that persistent Yankee of old Rome, Julius Cæsar, my task was to connect that then wild region of "all Gaul" with just such a chain of boats as this.

Here my mind performs a veritable miracle. One moment I am looking out of my memory window at the Spanish Peaks, which wooed us on from Pueblo, Colorado, with tantalizing promise of the glories that lie concealed from us beyond; the next I find myself back in Cologne's cathedral tower gazing on the distant Seven Mountains, with their sure promise of the castled hills which make the Rhine country the storm centre of old romance.

I see my red-covered "Baedeker" on a

THE HUMOR OF IT

book-shelf within easy reach, and am tempted to refresh my memory and weary my readers with a detailed description of the Rhine journey; but, recalling my original purpose to chronicle impressions only, I turn my back on the tempter, and a moment later I have my reward. I feel again the rush of that fierce storm of wind and rain which brought us to anchor in the middle of the river under the shadow of Rheinfels, the grandest ruin that overlooks the Rhine. The air was charged with electricity. As I have said, we literally felt the lightning as it shook the castle's crumbling walls; and when we looked again the contour of the ruin was perceptibly changed. As the lightning flashed above the castle and the thunder reverberated through its deserted halls, it became less difficult to realize the storm and stress through which Rheinfels had passed during those two hundred years, marked by assault and siege,

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

explosions and fire, plague, pestilence, and famine.

I don't know just why we lingered over night at Bingen, unless it was because of the spell which Mrs. Norton's once popular poem had thrown over me in my early youth. But since ours was altogether a "sentimental journey," we voted that Bingen must not be ignored. I find my memory of the town is narrowing down to two impressions. I vividly recall our tramp in the early evening up and down hill, through narrow, dimly lighted streets. As we peered inquisitively into open windows and doors and studied the simple, happy faces of groups assembled in doorways and in public places, we were profoundly impressed, as we had been elsewhere, with the simple, childlike content of the German people—a condition scarcely observable among our native-born Americans.

I recall an inconsequential occurrence on

THE HUMOR OF IT

our way from Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle) to Emmaburg, the reputed home of the romantic Emma, Charlemagne's daughter, and her lover-husband, Eginhard. It was *Christihimmelfahrt* (Ascension Day), and with a small party of German friends we had boarded an excursion train along with several hundred plain and well-mannered people, mainly from the city factories. Looking out of the car window, we found ourselves face to face with a father and daughter — evidently Americans — seated in a parlor car attached to the through train from Paris to Berlin. The trains were only a few feet apart. The two eyed us with that patronizing air so becoming in foreigners! Without seeming to listen we listened, and this was the comment that greeted us: "Quite fine-looking Germans — for third class!" With the fondness for superlatives so habitual with our people, the young lady turned her eye-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

glasses upon us once more, and responded, "Very."

With good-looking and fairly well-dressed Germans all about us, and my blond-haired, German-madonna-faced wife by my side,— a manly little boy on her lap, borrowed from a friend who had boys to lend,— I heartily enjoyed the qualified compliment unconsciously paid us by our countryman, and had n't the heart to destroy the illusion by so much as a word of English.

I smile, audibly, as I recall our reception at the *Hôtel le Grand Monarque* in Aix-la-Chapelle. A friend had engaged rooms for us weeks before. On our arrival we were obsequiously met, first by the *portier* and then by the manager and manageress, and ushered into a front parlor bedroom furnished with all the stuffy grandeur of a half-century ago. The host smilingly remarked that he had appropriately given us the bridal chamber, and

THE HUMOR OF IT

he regretted that it was not more befitting the dignity of his guests. "And here," he added, bowing low, with one hand on his heart, the other pointing to the centre-table, "here are a few (!) lilies of the valley, which allow me to present to the bride with my especial compliments!"

Nothing since that far-off day in Sacramento had so completely overwhelmed my Mary. Taken wholly by surprise, she blushed like a school girl, and stammered forth her thanks, remarking that she had thought our mature years would ward off all suspicion that we were newly married. "And then," she added, blushing again, "it begins to seem as though we had been married for years."

Here the manageress, with pride in her voice and mien, responded, in rather better English than her noble lord could command:

"My *Mann* never makes a mistake,

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

madam. None are too old to escape his quick glance."

Then, thinking she had been too bold, she courtesied girlishly and added, "Not that you are old, madam. I was a woman grown when you were born."

And with that the well-matched pair bowed themselves out, leaving us free to give vent to our pent-up enjoyment of our own discomfort and of the evident satisfaction the occasion had given our host and hostess; a satisfaction which fairly blossomed forth on their faces—and in the bill rendered next day.

I smile, but not audibly, as I recall a trivial incident in the famous *Schatzkammer*, or treasure-chamber, of the cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle. An ex-minister and his wife were our guests, and we were showing them the sights of the city, of which the famous ninth-century cathedral, built by Charlemagne, was the culmination. Nearly every-

thing we had pointed out to them bore some relation to that high-handed, far-sighted, and pious founder of empire, whom the Church has placed in its catalogue of saints. In the *Schatzkammer* also there was much to fix the visitor's mind on Charlemagne and hold it there. The sacristan in charge, very tall and portly, and with a surprisingly high-keyed voice, recited from memory his well-conned lesson in English. It was evident that he had little or no comprehension of the meaning of the words used.

“This is a lock of hair from the sacred head of Charlemagne, a highly valued relic of the saint”; and “this is a piece of the shin-bone of Charlemagne”; and so on through the list of carefully treasured relics.

The ex-minister, something of a wag, and everywhere made conscious of too much Charlemagne, looked up at the giant sacristan and coolly said :

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

“ My friend, I ’ve been hearing very much about Charlemagne’s remains during the last half-hour, and confess I ’m somewhat confused. You tell me Charlemagne is buried in a sitting posture under the dome yonder. I follow you to the *Schatz*-chamber, or whatever you call it, — this room, I mean, — and here you point out the shin-bone and other pieces of Charlemagne’s anatomy scattered about the room, each separately covered with gold and encased in glass. Now how can the remains be there — and yet part of them be here ? It would seem to me to be your duty to collect the remains of your patron saint and bury them in the tomb yonder, and so prepare them for the resurrection ! ”

The ex-minister’s face was as serious as the grave, but we had known from a warning he had given us that something was coming.

The joke, if you can call it a joke, proved to be on himself, for our sacristan, as I had

THE HUMOR OF IT

known, could n't comprehend a word the man said. He blushed, and turning to me asked me to repeat the inquiry in German. The request embarrassed me, for my linguistic resources were limited, and I had been there before and had evinced not even the shadow of a doubt as to the sacredness of the relics. I translated the preamble and inquiry as well as possible without paralyzing the man of relics with the audacity of his visitor. Turning a reproachful glance upon the irreverent inquirer, and forgetting for the moment his pretension to a knowledge of the English tongue, his high-keyed voice gave answer, "*Ich weiss nicht.*"

But, indignant as he was, the unexpectedly large supplemental fee placed in his hand as the colonel passed out of the chamber brought a forgiving and pitying smile to the face of our host.

As we emerged from the cathedral Mary

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

whispered to me, "I never was so glad to get out into the open air!" The colonel's wife shook her husband's arm and said, "Edward, I'm positively ashamed of you. This is the last time I go sight-seeing with you. I want to go home."



XXI

THE SENTIMENTAL SIDE OF IT

HOW scornfully the memory refuses to retain the information gained from guides and guide-books, and how lovingly it clings to the "unconsidered trifles," the little "asides," which at the time seemed wholly trivial ! I have a faint recollection of following a clever guide through the halls of Heidelberg's castle and conscientiously listening to his well-conned story of battle and diplomacy and intrigue, with which the famous ruin is associated in history ; but that is all. My

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

memory lingers longest on the misty rain that drove us under cover, and the childish joy we found in sitting on the wall in one of the arches of the picturesque passage-way leading to the Saal-Bau, waiting for the rain to stop, and incidentally commenting on the strangeness of the fate that had set us down here in the very heart of mediæval Germany, thus inviting us to continue in this atmosphere of old romance a courtship begun many thousand miles away on a westward-looking coast wholly unknown when Heidelberg was in its prime.

Later there came the supreme moment which I cannot conscientiously pass over with a mere mention. Lured by a brief cessation of the rain, we closed the day, as we had planned, with the long mile tramp up the mountain to Königstuhl — the highest point between the Neckar and the Rhine. The air was charged with moisture, but we took

THE SENTIMENTAL SIDE OF IT

our chance of another gleam of sunshine through the mist and trudged on up the steep, zigzag path until we reached the peak. A tall tower invited us to continue the ascent, though the top of the tower was enveloped in impenetrable mist. Dismissing our garrulous guide, we took our seat under the canopy on the topmost step of the tower, and patiently waited for the view we had come so far to see. The guide gave me a curious look as he took his fee, which, translated into English and run into a proverb, said, "There's no fool like an old fool!" What would he have said — certainly no proverb would have done him justice — had he beheld the look of serene satisfaction with which we settled down to what promised to be a long and un-availing wait? How could that commonplace creature comprehend the fact that even failure to witness the view would not leave us wholly comfortless? It was no small

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

thing for us, whom cruel circumstance had kept apart for years, simply to be alone together between earth and sky; to look down from our eyrie upon the clouds, now "shepherded by the slow, unwilling wind," now scattered by the cone-shaped fir trees projecting high in air, and to behold even with the mind's eye the panorama spread out before us. And thus gazing, the thought came to us, and stayed with us, of how little moment, after all, are the numberless activities in the valley below! How far removed from us the social and business and political ambitions, the farm and home cares that seem so much to yonder dwellers on the plain!

Just as we were preparing for the descent, a phosphorescent glow in the west gave promise of a change. The mist became luminous; the clouds disappeared, and — wonder of wonders! — there below us was

THE SENTIMENTAL SIDE OF IT

revealed, as though it were a dissolving view materialized for the moment, only to pass away as it had come, a scene so grand, so strangely beautiful, that I am powerless to do more than faintly outline the impression it has left on my memory. The sunlight had turned every drop of water into a crystal; had transformed the distant Rhine and the nearer Neckar—scarcely released from their covering of mist—into molten-silver streams; had turned every gray villa and whitewashed cottage into a palace of light. Almost beneath us seemed the Neckar, winding its way forth from its imprisonment among the mountains. To the west shone the Rhine, a long, satiny, white ribbon—with the curl not out of it yet—beginning far to the south, beyond the velvety black edges of the Black Forest. The sunlight made one last sweep over the plain and hills and mountains, lighting up scores of villages

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

and giving us memorable glimpses of the Odenwald and the Hartz mountains to the northeast,—and then all this beauty and grandeur was enveloped in mist, and we descended to earth.



XXII

A DIP INTO HISTORY

NOR would I forget that ideal summer day we spent amid the ruins that mark the once famous seat of the Julichs. High above the valley of the Roer east of Düsseldorf, commanding an unsurpassable view of sun-illuminated fields of green and yellow, and including miles of narrow and winding river, spanned here and there by picturesquely arched stone bridges, stands the ruined castle of Nideggen, where in the stormy twelfth century a rough and barbarous Count Wilhelm lorded it over his retainers, and where, in his

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

wrath against the warlike Archbishop Engelbert II., he shut his prisoner in a cage and hung the cage on the outer wall, defying his enemies to come and take him. The chronicles of Cologne tell us that for three years and a half the archbishop divided his time between the chapel, the keep, and the cage; and, having a fine sense of poetic justice, the chronicler declares that the ghost of the wicked count, unable to rest at night, awakens, frightened by bad dreams, rolls from side to side in his tomb, rises and goes down into the dungeon, and, as he was wont to do in life, rattles the chains which once bound Engelbert, and then takes up his slow and weary walk through the rooms and on the walls of the castle, thus doomed to live over again and again this shameful chapter in his shameless life.

But this is history — though the merest outline — and my story is personal. We

A DIP INTO HISTORY

left the rail at Düren, where a private carriage, placed at our disposal by a rich manufacturer, rapidly conveyed us through three or four picturesque little villages off the main highway. It was a Catholic holiday and everybody was attired in his Sunday best. The men with their long pipes and sabots, the women in their short frocks, heavy slippers, and home-knit pink stockings, the barefooted children gleefully chasing one another; the dogs, cows, pigs, and chickens — everything that had life — gazed in wonder upon our overwhelming equipage, doubtless fancying us to be titled folk or immensely rich, instead of an unpretending American couple on their wedding journey, and a trifle embarrassed by their borrowed splendor.

From his high seat our driver could look into the projecting second stories of the little old bulging cottages crowded in thickly along the narrow streets; he could, but he

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

would n't think of such a thing! Attired in livery of green, with "buttons all over 'im," and with a shining tile drawn well down over his massive brow, he had a certain dignity to sustain, and evidently regarded ours as quite uncertain. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. We did the looking!

Finally the walled town of Nideggen loomed before our vision, and soon we drove through the city's ponderous gate, no guard obstructing our passage. We had not been long enough abroad to feel quite at ease as the old men and boys along our triumphal way to the inn honored our coming with uplifted hats. I admitted the fact that this homage to an American made me feel a trifle conscience-smitten. Mary laughed at my scruples and said she rather enjoyed it; it seemed a partial realization of some of the Jane Austen inspired dreams of her girlhood.

A DIP INTO HISTORY

I am not going to describe the castle or the church, or other interesting environments of other days, though I will admit I have to fight continually an old man's tendency to prose. My choicest recollection of Nideggen is of the short half-hour we spent sitting on the bench in the street in front of the inn, waiting for supper and watching the throng of villagers coming and going, and in undertone repeating the little confidences which come to a pair very much in love and completely isolated from the commonplaces of home and from the regulation sights along the main lines of travel.

"How strange," exclaimed Mary, "that you and I are here together! How did it come about? Sometimes, for the moment, I feel as though it could n't be right to be so happy all alone with you in a strange land."

My wise (or was it unwise?) answer was that that was one of the differences be-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

tween women and men. Women retain longest the old mediæval idea that we must distrust our joys, while men philosophically take what comes of happiness, and ask no questions.



XXIII

IN OSTEND, BUT NOT OF IT

BEFORE quitting the continent I want to chronicle an impression of Ostend—the jumping-off place of Belgium, and one of the most popular summer resorts of continental Europe. Nowhere else was I so thoroughly impressed with the artificial splendors of the gay world abroad and of our apartness from it all, our lack of sympathy with it all. At no other point was my soul so driven back upon itself with wonder and amazement at the follies of my brother man. The glass-fronted dining-saloons of the hotels, ranged

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

along the broad dyke, were wide open to the sea, enabling us as we sauntered along the dyke to pass from one scene of bewildering elegance to another and another.

The railings were so many picture frames, beautiful with trailing vines and flowers. Elegant toilettes commanded my Mary's profound admiration, and she thriftily undertook to estimate the cost of this and that elaborately made gown. I recall two evident lovers in a flower-framed balcony, looking unutterable things. The little lady, in pale blue silk and an abundance of lace, was substituting a delicate bouquet of her own arranging for a gaudy one of her lover's choosing, and he was blushing at the indirect assault upon his taste.

As we strolled on past Ostend at her dinner, I made the ungallant remark, "How commonplace we are as compared with all this splendor!"

IN OSTEND, BUT NOT OF IT

Mary held my arm a trifle tighter than before, and smilingly rebuked me with, "I wonder you did n't make the discovery before."

Without waiting to weigh my words I exclaimed, "Thank God for the commonplace! This artificial life would drive me mad."

Of course we tried the so-called bathing machines — nothing more than portable bath-houses drawn by horses into and out of the water. My most distinct memory of this experience is of a recurrence of Mary's feeling of strangeness — alone with me in this little house and several rods from land.

In the early evening we joined the crowd on their way to the Cursaal. Under the great dome of the amphitheatre we took seats at one of the many hundred tea-stands, and while we sipped our tea listened delightedly to an orchestra led by a venerable man

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

with long gray hair, who seemed strangely out of place and time, the centre of a thousand or more very voluble, painfully modern ladies and gentlemen. We passed on into the gambling-room, finding it as thronged as we had found the reading-room empty. Three tables were in active operation, and silver and gold were changing hands with confusing rapidity. At the tables sat several elderly ladies, winning and losing without show of emotion. One lady past seventy, with a worldly beautiful face, stood behind a pretty young girl coaching her on certain points of the game. Evidently she had made a careful study of what John Stuart Mill terms "the elimination of chances." Old men and mere youths, grandmothers and granddaughters, were seated side by side. I have rarely witnessed a more depressing sight than those circles of amateur gamblers — all silent, their joyless, stoical faces schooled

IN OSTEND, BUT NOT OF IT

against all expression of emotion. Even the gamblers in the Chinese quarter of San Francisco, with their hellish chatter, have at least an undertone of sociability.

It was a relief to escape from this fascinating scene and emerge into the ballroom. The literally mad whirl was on. The waltzers wound round and round, like whirling dervishes. We had thought to join the dance, but a few moments' observation convinced us that we were not of this little world, and had best refrain from making a spectacle of ourselves. We retired to an adjoining restaurant and soon found ourselves in a world in which we could vigorously take part.

We had scarcely begun our lunch when Mary's eye became riveted on a couple seated at a table across the room. The gentleman was faultlessly attired in an evening suit, and a huge diamond glistened on the little finger

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

of his large, full-blooded hand. The lady was apparently about half his age, and her beauty of face and form was in striking contrast with his coarseness and general redness. He seemed the typical Parisian clubman; she a flesh and blood realization of one of Balzac's charming pictures of femininity — the Duchesse de Langlais, for example.

"Do you think they are husband and wife?" asked Mary in an undertone, after vainly endeavoring to gather the desired information from their rapid conversation.

"How can I even guess?" I replied. "Does the marriage relation so stamp itself upon man and woman that ever after, when seen together, the stamp is in evidence? And do you think *we* have that unmistakable impress? If not yet, how long will it be before I shall be promoted from possible father or uncle to unquestioned husband?"

Ignoring my banter, all the time watching

IN OSTEND, BUT NOT OF IT

the couple from out the corners of her eyes, Mary exclaimed : " I feel as though I ought to interfere. That brutal man keeps filling her glass, and she seems to think she must empty it as often as he fills it. And see, there comes a second bottle ! I just believe the brute has hypnotized her, don't you ? "

After due deliberation I gave my judgment in these guarded words : " No, my dear, she is drinking the wine because she likes it. It is hard for one of your Puritan birth and education to comprehend the wine-drinking habits of the French."

As we took our departure, Mary, still of the same opinion, gave one last appealing glance at the couple, saying in undertone, " I still feel a solicitude for that dear little woman. How can she help becoming intoxicated ? And then think of her helplessness in the hands of that brute of a man ! "

Soon we were on the deck of the steamer

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

headed toward Dover, the continent of Europe slipping from us, — as it proved, forever. It was a glorious sight. The waning moon followed us westward, silvering our steamer's long trail and covering earth and sea with a halo. Establishing ourselves side by side in steamer chairs, with our steamer rug over us, we watched the long row of lights along the dyke and the palace of light we had left, and in low tones went over the events of the evening, chiefly impressed with the artificiality of the life we had looked in upon and our own apartness from it all. Just before sleep came upon us I felt a hand in mine and heard in drowsy tones the words, "How happy I am to leave it all behind and to be alone with you on the water — and with our dear old San Diego moon keeping watch and ward over us!"



XXIV

SOMEWHAT LOST IN LONDON

“**L**OST in London!” How commonplace the suggestion, but how romantic the experience to us home-grown provincials, unused to other than chess-board villages and cities! The commonest cab, whose red-faced driver recklessly turned his horse to the left — seeming to compel everybody else to turn to the left — was far better than the costliest carriage, because more exclusive. The well-nigh aimless ’bus rides through the great thoroughfares, which seemed so narrow and congested, were somewhat repressive in ten-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

dency ; but the throng of humanity below us on the street gave us another phase of that delightful aloneness which was the chief charm of our long wedding journey. Sure of each other, we feigned the usual old-married-couple indifference to finding seats together, and the result was a variety of experiences, all pleasant, which raised our former low opinion of the civility and intelligence of the shop people and mechanics of the great metropolis. When one of us would succeed in drawing out something more than commonly interesting, the attention of the other was called to the story,—whether it was true or fanciful mattered little to us,—and the narrator, shrewdly seeing the belated bride and groom beneath our dusty, travel-worn garments and our feigned indifference, would kindly repeat his story with such enlargement as the unexpected interest of his hearers seemed to warrant.

SOMEWHAT LOST IN LONDON

Thus, like children in the woods, we wandered aimlessly through rain and shine and mist, and at the end of the long day relied on our never-failing providence—the cabby—to convey us back to our starting point.

One Sunday evening I experienced a novel sensation—a slight qualm of jealousy! the first since that incident on the beach near Salt Lake City. An old lover of my wife, himself now married and settled in a suburb of London, called by appointment at our hotel. The greetings were unusually cordial. Our interchange of congratulations was all that convention could ask. We tried to draw out our visitor as to his London life, his London wife, and how it all came about; but he responded only in commonplace generalities, with Irish wit turning the conversation to suit his own stubborn will and purpose. The talk then turned to “the good old days,” which he frankly and feel-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

ingly admitted were his happiest days. As his experience in America antedated my special interest in Mary, I modestly relapsed into silence, and he, with steadily increasing volubility, made good the partial vacuum in the conversation. After a brief flow of hilarity our visitor and Mary settled down to the detail work of reminiscence — a kind of talk always interesting to one, sometimes to two, but usually a bore to a third. I excused myself, pleading the need of fresh air and exercise.

I walked on and on through streets immortalized by historians and novelists, but how little of active interest I felt in all I saw! I felt for the first time the full measure of my indebtedness to the sweet-hearted, glad-eyed woman whom I had left at the hotel, talking over old times with an old lover — old times in which I had no part, save only as the “middle-aged walking gent”

SOMEWHAT LOST IN LONDON

in the comedy, here and there appearing on the scene to give it a trifle more of color. A clock from some distant tower with painful deliberateness struck the hour of nine — the hour our visitor had named for his departure. A near-by clock with more urgency repeated the notification. I turned about, quickened my pace, and soon reached the hotel. Entering the parlor adjoining the one in which I had left the ex-lovers, I heard the low murmur of their voices, his — after the old-time manner of the man — firmly controlling the conversation. I had not the heart to break in upon them, and so took a seat by the window and watched the weird effects of mingled starlight and lamplight on Trafalgar Square, the statue of Nelson in its exalted isolation looking down upon me as from history, suggesting some things which needed to be said to me. The old sea-captain seemed to say :

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

“What do *you* know of loneliness? What have you to complain of? Re-read the story of the last years of my life and you will fall upon your knees and thank God that He has sent you, to comfort your declining years, that guileless, sweet-souled Puritan yonder, who has put herself, soul and body, into your care and keeping, asking no questions as to the heart secrets of your past, yet frankly telling you the little all she has to tell of her own heart history.”

Without waiting for further reflection I pushed the hall doors farther back with a slam to announce myself, and soon appeared upon the scene. You should have witnessed the relief which came over my Mary's tell-tale face on seeing me once more standing before her, safe and unharmed! She rushed to me, and apparently unconscious of the presence of her guest, covered my face with kisses, between sobs of relief exclaiming:

SOMEWHAT LOST IN LONDON

“Darling, never do that again! Why, suppose anything had happened to you in the street — suppose you had been waylaid and robbed and killed, or even beaten to insensibility, — who would have identified you? Where would you have been carried? What would have become of me, alone in this great city, and with only a single near friend, and he with a family at home awaiting his coming? Arthur would soon have been obliged to leave me alone in this dreary hotel. Oh, the anguish with which I waited and listened for your step! And when I heard the doors slam I just knew they were bringing you in maimed or dead — the loud noise they made was so unlike you!”

Thus unwound, her self-control gave way entirely, and laying her head upon my shoulder she gave herself up to hysterical sobs.

The Arthur of other days, now thoroughly subdued by this tragic exhibition of grief,

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

gently and courteously bade us farewell, taking with him our heartiest good wishes for himself and family.

I proceeded to make the best apologies I could invent for my thoughtless and unmannerly long stay. I had n't the heart to tell her, my trusting bride of less than a year, that I had allowed myself to indulge, even for a moment, in a swift-fleeting qualm of jealousy — the first to enter my soul since that far-off day in Utah, and, thank God! the last in all these years we have spent together. And thank God again for the certainty that comes to me now — the certainty that no future misunderstanding can by any possibility estrange us! Of this I am surer than that I shall live to see to-morrow's sun.



XXV

IN SCOTLAND AND THE LAKE COUNTRY

OUR Scotland is a succession of fast-flitting pictures, with only here and there a rest for mind and heart. That delightful evening with friends in Milngavie! — a mansion several centuries old, which once had entertained one of the Charleses and naturally was proud of the tradition; a family in which hospitality was extended with a quiet enthusiasm that betokened positive pleasure. I see before me now the stately wife and mother seated at the piano im-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

provising accompaniments to songs she had never before heard, my Mary with delightful abandon pouring out her glad soul in song. And that dainty bit of femininity in white, a niece from Jamaica! Her thin, plaintive voice throbbed with emotion, and as she sang the quaint songs of her island home the tears started from my eyes—I know not just why.

My mind lingers over that long summer twilight at Oban—at least a hundred miles north of our own Manitoba. After a late dinner we walked far to the south of the village and there for hours sat watching the gold-red sea of sky filled with lazily floating islands of clouds. The village with its many lights extended a cheery welcome to incoming fisher craft and pleasure yachts. Upon the craggy height to the northwest stood the black tower of Dunolly Castle, silhouetted against the phosphorescent glow.

SCOTLAND AND THE LAKE COUNTRY

After a long and eloquent silence I looked at my watch to find it was nearing midnight.

“What matter?” said Mary, grasping my hand and bidding me resume my seat. “Are you not happy here? I am. What are figures on the dial? When we take up our new life on the other side, of course we’ll have to consult the clock, we’ll have to eat and drink and sleep and work and play by the clock. But here and now, my Festus, I want to ‘count time by heart-throbs,’ or, better yet, not think of time at all.”

Then came this burst of confidence, quite taking me by storm :

“Dear husband, how sweet of you to love and marry me and bring me with you to far-away Oban! My soul is filled with a flood of new happiness which only Oban could supply. How did you happen to think of Oban? I had never heard of it;

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

and yet now it seems to me that of all the sights I have seen, this best satisfies my soul."

Then, suddenly becoming serious, she added, "But if you were not here the solemn beauty of this scene would drive me mad!"

I dare not tell in detail the story of our visit to the lake region of England, for every detail is charged with so much of special interest to me. As is usual, the inconsequential lingers longest in my mind. I recall the sense of importance with which we sat down to supper in the second floor dining-room of the old inn at Cockermouth. On the departure of the maid for the kitchen Mary looked across the big table and said, "It seems as though we were living over a chapter in some old English novel. It is hard to realize that you are you and I am I, sitting bolt upright in these high-backed

SCOTLAND AND THE LAKE COUNTRY

chairs, on opposite sides of this great table centuries old. If I was n't afraid of shocking that dear little maid — hear her step on the stairs? — I'd come around on your side of the table and actually hug and kiss you, just to assure myself that it is real!"

More fortunate than when we were in Scotland, our stage drive through the lake region of England was in a blaze of sunlight, with only now and then a mist and a few drops of rain. Somehow it seemed a homecoming, this trip. Some strain of atavism asserted itself, informing me that all this was mine, as it had been my forebears', to have and to enjoy. The spirit of youth took possession of me, and I allowed myself to talk familiarly with Skiddaw and Helvellyn. I dropped my reserve with our fellow travelers and drew from a sombre old lady the remark (possibly ironical), "You Americans are very clever!" Mary sat smiling

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

demurely by my side, silent most of the time, "perfectly happy," she said, and her radiant face confirmed her testimony.

The driver gave a free ride to an old ex-coachman on his way to Ambleside to see his sister. I asked him how long he had lived in the lake region. He answered, "Seventy odd year, but I've got a mother as can beat that; she's lived here and here-about upward of ninety year."

I asked him if he knew Wordsworth.

"Knew 'im well," was his quick answer. "And a nice man 'e was. Nobody never said nothin' agen Mr. Wordsworth—they could n't. But he was the forgetfullest man I ever seen. 'E'd forget 'is 'ead if it was n't fast! Many a time I've seen 'is sister followin' 'im out to the gate to brush the dander off 'is coat."

After the lapse of a few minutes the old man continued: "It's nice in you outsiders

SCOTLAND AND THE LAKE COUNTRY

to 'old 'im in such store; but, between me an' you, barrin' 'is portry, of which I hain't no judge, 'e wa'n't thought to be so much more'n 'is neighbors, and I'm certain 'e never set 'imself up to be."



XXVI

BETWEEN SEA AND SKY

ON shipboard and headed toward home! How vividly do I recall the thrill of joy with which we stood on deck that first evening out, and watched alternately the receding land of the Britons and the glory of the western sky welcoming us back to our home! How the word "home" had grown in my vocabulary within a single year! In sentiment it had previously meant to me my home town, county, State. In fact it had meant little more to me than two square rooms with books scattered everywhere — on shelves, mantels,

tables, chairs, and the floor. During my *Wanderjahr* it had grown to mean immeasurably more than that—in sentiment and in fact. In sentiment it had expanded until it covered the whole country; and the flag, which once had seemed to me a combination of incongruous colors, was now all the poet Drake had seen in it. The sentiment had even invaded the narrow precinct of fact. “Home” to me now meant more living rooms, and, too, more room for books. And yet, infinitely more than these, it meant a sacred retreat from the rough usages of the world, with a priestess installed therein, whose presence would be “a good diffused,” whose morning and evening words of faith and hope and cheer would be to me both mass and vesper service,—embodied worship, a substantial bit of heaven on earth. How much more than all this our home has actually been to me let these chronicles of the comings and

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

goings of our Ada and Marie bear their own simple testimony.

Two pictures rise before me at the mention of our return voyage. One was the strangely becalmed, star-lighted ocean at midnight, recalling Shelley's "speaking quietude." It was our second night out. Fastnet and the Needles were long past, and not a light save "heaven's signal lamps" was to be seen in all that great circle of blue water and sky. As we sat alone in our preëmpted corner on the upper deck we seemed the sole inhabitants of a planet whirring through space.

"Mary," I sentimentally exclaimed, holding her hand more tightly than before, "do you not see—can you not feel—in this impressive solitude the solemn fact that through the coming years you and I are to be very much alone—together, yet alone—alone with God?"

BETWEEN SEA AND SKY

With a tremor of happiness in her voice and in her tightening grasp of my hand, Mary answered, "Yes, dear one, and I am glad it is so. God will not—cannot—leave me comfortless, with you by my side."

How petty seemed all that Old World striving after social recognition, its worship of rank, its over-regard for externals! How futile the mad race for wealth and position everywhere apparent on our own side of the Atlantic! How everlastingly wise we were in our unworldly wisdom that night with God on the sea!

The one other impression I would record is of our day in fairyland. In my boyish dreams I had many times sailed away into cloudland, and later I had followed Shelley's "Queen Mab" and Balzac's "Seraphita," into regions far remote from earth; but it was reserved for these my Indian summer days—this actual journey into cloudland!

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

The ocean was calm as an inland lake in summer. Great banks of clouds enveloped us, the sunlight imparting to them a silvery sheen. They seemed about to dissolve, and yet they lingered. Great open spaces seemed like lakes banked by snow-covered hills. Through this unsubstantial archipelago our steamer pushed on and on, now emerging into some vast inland sea, now wholly shut in by clouds. "Who could have guessed we would visit fairyland together?" was Mary's exclamation as we sailed out of the cloud-banks into the sunlight.



XXVII

OUR FIRST OUTING SINCE THE CHILDREN CAME

AUGUST 1, 1884. — I can't let our July outing pass without a report, for it was our first jaunt together since the children came.

Our start from home was accompanied by an episode. A minute after the fixed time of departure we boarded a moving train, only to hear from the conductor, when too late to retreat, that we should have taken the second, not the first one out. This train, we were informed, would bear us from, not to,

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

our destination ! Nothing remained but to get off at the first station, there wait for a train back to our starting point, and in the evening make another start.

Instead of inwardly swearing at the situation, we laughed at our vexation and decided to make a lark of it. Of course our friends who may read this confession will divest the term "lark" of its usual associations when they find it employed by a staid old couple who do not boast a single bad habit !

As we alighted from the car at the siding, we saw at a glance that we should be thrown upon our own resources for entertainment during our enforced stay. The station agent evidently suspected us of—something, I don't and I guess he did n't know just what ; and so, as became a peace-lover and peace-pursuer, I frankly told him all, thus insuring ourselves "the freedom of the city" during our stay. We strolled along the dusty road

OUR FIRST OUTING

well on into the country. Coming to a beautiful grove of oaks, we seated ourselves on the grass in the shade, and there our perturbed spirits found repose. Farmers and their "women folks" on their way back from town eyed us curiously, wondering how it had happened that two townspeople old enough to know better had strayed so far away from their little world.

As we sat by the roadside "getting acquainted," the distant whistle of an engine sent a thrill of dismay through our souls. Could we make our train? You should have seen us fly over that dusty road! You should have beheld our entry into the car, our faces red with heat and dripping with perspiration, Mary's hair nearly down, the station agent following us into the car with our handbags, his broad grin advertising our discomfort, to the undisguised amusement of the passengers.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Back in our home city, we ate our supper at the depot restaurant, and then, taking a carriage, went — home? Oh, no; we had already contributed too liberally to the gayety of others; and besides, we could n't think of going through a repetition of those tearful, heartrending good-byes. So we simply made a farewell call we had intended to make on friends in a distant part of the city; and no one was the wiser for our little mishap. By midnight we were well on our journey.

The next day found us visitors in an ideally beautiful suburban home, a large house of old colonial pattern, set down in the centre of a forest of maples and elms. During the heat of the day we sat in the cool parlors and on the broad verandas, surrounded with all the comforts and luxuries which abundant means could supply. In the early evening we enjoyed an invigorating drive behind two splendid bays, famous prize-winners

OUR FIRST OUTING

“for style and speed combined.” At night we were domiciled in a room so elegant in its furnishings as to make us feel a trifle homesick.

But amid the profusion of flowers and music and rare paintings and elegant furnishings in our friend’s home, there was scarcely a moment of the day so full of enjoyment as to crowd out of my thoughts the red cottage on the hill overlooking the river, — the house where our babies were born, “my own heart’s home.”

.
A week spent at a great caravansary where all the world seemed to be under one roof and bent on making the most of the occasion. A great convention was in session, part of which — a very small part — I was. On the convention side of this experience I have only a confused memory. I recall a hastily prepared paper read by me, which some were

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

good enough to praise, the substance of which, for the life of me, I can't recall. I took part in several discussions, intensely interesting at the time but wholly gone from me now—all but the memory of a woman's face looking up into mine, and a woman's wonder that I had dared to speak so plainly and could on the spur of the moment acquit myself so well. Had this unconscious flatterer begun on her subject a score of years before, she surely would have spoiled him for any usefulness in the world. Now I know my limitations too well to be set up by praise so evidently prompted by the heart.

On the heart side my memory of the week is clearer. I vividly recall our first evening on the veranda with the delightful promise of a whole week together, and with no cares to infest the day; my delight on finding that one and another of my professional friends were drawn toward my wife, whom they had not seen before; our quiet

OUR FIRST OUTING

—relatively quiet—meals together in the farthest corner of the spacious dining-room, far more enjoyable than the banquets, formal lunches, and dinners which the reporters pronounced “delightful”; the chance discovery of “elective affinities,” or at least promising possibilities for future friendships, among the women and men we met at table, in promenades, at the springs, in carriages, and on the steamers; the self-complacency—ill-concealed, I fear—with which we passed around the several photographic proofs of our children which had been mailed us from home, ostensibly that we might obtain a consensus of opinion as to which was best, but really that our new-found friends might see how rich we were. And I would not fail to mention the long heart-to-heart talks in our room before breakfast, with no children to interrupt, no kitchen queen to molest or make us afraid!

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

This last paragraph, as I re-read it, can well be used by my friends as an argument against late marriages, for does it not tend to show how delightfully narrowing is wedded happiness when it falls to the lot of a man who has passed beyond the period of all-round development?

.

Presto! We find ourselves transferred from a drawing-room car to a little, well tucked-up stateroom on a steamer bound for the Saguenay.

Our brief stop at Ste. Anne de Beaupré, on the St. Lawrence below Quebec, is devoted wholly to the huge church of St. Anne, with its faith-inviting relics, and their complement, the hundreds of canes and crutches left by those who have been miraculously healed. We join a party of tourists — believers and heretics — and are briskly sprinkled with holy water by a handsome

OUR FIRST OUTING

young priest officiating in one of the chapels. The patronizing smile on his face suggests the irreverent thought that perhaps the tonsured Frenchman, with the keen sense of humor for which his race is noted, looks upon his part in the scenes daily enacted here as simply one of the minor rôles in a huge comedy, of which the holy water and canes and crutches are only so many stage properties. But doubtless the priest really takes himself seriously, and his smile is one of pure benevolence when bestowed upon those of us who stand before the chancel, and one of genuine complacency when it beams upon the believers who devoutly kneel at the chancel rail.

At the Murray Bay stop we somehow manage to engage a *calèche* of a stupid young French Canadian, who stubbornly refuses to accept Mary's French as French! In this primitive vehicle we go bounding over the

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

rough road up the narrow Murray River valley, our little pony pluckily hauling us up hill and down hill on a continuous and lively trot, the natives coming out to meet us with many a savage pleasantry hurled at our driver, who is evidently a favorite along the route.

My enjoyment of the ride is slightly marred by my wife's suggestion that perhaps the natives think we are on our wedding journey! And then, to quiet the flurry raised in my breast, she adds, "Don't you think that, twelve years after, our age should protect us?"

I smile cynically and answer, "On the contrary, the evident difference in our ages doubtless *of itself* suggests a recent marriage, since you are hardly young enough to pose as my daughter, and old men are given to marrying young wives. And then," I add, after a pause for reflection, "your spick-and-span new travelling suit must strengthen the illusion."

OUR FIRST OUTING

“And your spick-and-span new business suit, with the unbroken creases in the trousers, should make the illusion complete,” is the wife’s defiant but illogical retort.

The only way I see out of the contention is to ask her if she does n’t think her very evident enjoyment of her husband’s society may convey the erroneous impression.

And *yet* she is not satisfied! Her quick response is that several times she has been on the point of cautioning me against a certain over-fond way I have before folks, but she had n’t supposed I would care what these dense French Canadians would think of us.

“I don’t, my dear,” I retort, “but —” just then we reach the top of a hill and see strung along the road a little village of picturesque one-story cottages, and to my relief the view claims my wife’s attention, and the subject is not resumed.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

I am rarely affected by historic associations, but must confess to an almost sentimental interest in ancient Tadousac, at the mouth of the Saguenay. I call it ancient, for my Parkman informs me that it was "the first harboring place of civilization" in the New World, the spot where the first serious attempt was made to maintain community life in New France. As I have with rare self-denial made up my mind to spare my friends the regulation semi-guide-book description of Montreal and Quebec, I may perhaps be indulged in a brief "aside" at this point.

We climbed the high, rock-ribbed hill in the southwest, and seated on a huge boulder, looking down upon the scene of many a tragic event in the history of New France, our minds fresh from the Parkman histories traversed the centuries, and we beheld strange sights in the narrow valley below. We saw Jacques Cartier, "bold, keen-featured, eager,"

OUR FIRST OUTING

standing on the deck of his little vessel on that first day of September, nearly three hundred and fifty years ago, and gazing wistfully yet suspiciously on this "gorge of the gloomy Saguenay, with its towering cliffs and sullen depth of waters," its narrow valley swarming with savages, his ships surrounded by curious natives in canoes, to whom the white-faced Frenchmen were as marvellous as if they had descended straight from the skies. Our minds went back to that far-off autumn when Pontgrave and Chauvin left a handful of men in log huts down yonder on the shore, commissioning them to gather a winter harvest of furs. When spring came, the only harvest found to have been gathered here was Death's. And later — just two hundred and forty-one years from the day of *our* discovery of Tadousac — there landed on these inhospitable rocks those devout Ursulines, of whom Madame de la Peltrie and

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

Marie de l'Incarnation were the inspirers and leaders, who sought and found in the New World the crown of martyrdom denied them in the Old. From these saintly women our thoughts turned naturally to the little Jesuit mission chapel down there on the northeast side of the Saguenay, which in 1746 was built on or near the site of several other chapels that in their turn had been destroyed by the enemy's fire. Later, on visiting the chapel, we found in charge, not the thin-visaged and grizzly old-time missionary our imagination had pictured, but instead a fat and well-favored young priest, who glibly told his tale and politely accepted our contribution — I had almost said his fee. Here, on this spot, for centuries the candles were kept burning for the faithful, except when the torch of the savage Indian or the scarcely less savage white foe had burned the altar to the ground.

OUR FIRST OUTING

When the shadows began to gather in the valley, our steamer started up the Saguenay. The solitude became intense. As we rounded one point after another in the river, we seemed to be pushing on from one solitude to another and a gloomier. The black waters, reflecting the stars, glistened with a weird phosphorescent glow. The sombre wooded hills seemed draped in mourning. The jutting promontories assumed titanic shapes. Sharp-featured faces peered out at us from the rocks, suggesting the spirit of the savage Montagnais whom the missionary zeal of the French could not save from the demoralization of French greed of gain.

As we neared a bend in the river a bright light startled us from our meditations, and looking up we saw, well up from the water on our left, a mass of gold-yellow flame leaping from the tall pines and deepening the yellow of the clouds. As we neared the

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

spot we heard the hadean music of the flames, a crackling and sputtering as if the earth were melting with fervent heat. With savage glee the elements were feasting on the very heart of the forest. At times a giant of the woods would topple over with a groan and a gasp, and then a million sparks would rise in celebration of the elemental victory.

On the return trip, as we neared the twin peaks, Trinity and Eternity, rising almost perpendicularly from the water, — the one eighteen hundred, the other sixteen hundred feet, — a rain-cloud, silver-tipped by the sun, enveloped the peaks with a halo which seemed rightfully to belong to them. A slight rainfall gave to the grayish-brown gneiss a rich-brown gloss which added to their glory.

As we paced the deck after the shower, I banteringly reminded Mary that the unquestionably newly wedded wife just ahead of us was leaning on her lover-husband's arm no

OUR FIRST OUTING

less unconscious of surroundings than was she herself.

The rebuke I richly deserved came in the form of words : " In this presence " — reverently looking up at the peaks — " why should one mind what others think or say ? "

I confessed I had blundered, but pleaded in extenuation that my mind, not over-strong at best, and wholly unaccustomed to great heights, had instinctively dropped from the sublime to the ridiculous in its effort to find relief from overpressure.

The solemn stillness of the Saguenay oppresses me still. The river seems a veritable Styx, as in fact it has been to the priests and laymen, to the soldiers of fortune and the savage Indians who opposed their progress. As we steamed down the silent river from one apparent lake to another, we looked in vain for flight of birds, and saw few signs of human habitation. The lasting impression

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

left upon my mind by the Saguenay trip is of leagues of green-brown, tree-covered rocks, forming a deep gorge through which the brown-black river swiftly flows, and over which a blue-vaulted roof is spread — and in the background of the picture loom the twin peaks, Trinity and Eternity.

The passage through the rock-bound channel from the sombre Saguenay to the sunny St. Lawrence was a relief such as one experiences on closing the leaves of the “Inferno” to listen to the song of birds and the laughter of children.



XXVIII

STORY OF SIX HAPPY YEARS

DECEMBER 4, 1900. — The passing of the old century compels retrospection. Looking backward on this the twenty-eighth anniversary of our wedding night, I am confronted with an unfinished task, a promise unredeemed, — the continuation of my fragmentary story of late-coming joys.

Six years have passed since I put upon paper my last confession of happiness — uneventful but resultful years. Lest the friends whose acquaintance dates back to the period before the new life came to me should sur-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

mise that my long-continued silence may mean the failure of my late attempt to make for myself a heaven on earth, or possibly a temperamental disqualification for sustained happiness, I am strongly moved to resume the pleasant task begun just twenty-one years ago last month.

At the outset let me state that whereas I then, at times, suspected I was old, I now know all too well the mysterious fact of age. My hand, then strong and free from suggestion of tremor, now moves laboriously across the page, its zigzag lines reminding me of the rail fences of my childhood days. But for Marie's assurance that she would type-write these pages for me I would scarcely have made the attempt on which I am now begun.

Twenty-eight years is a long stretch of time even for old eyes to traverse — long and yet how short ! What would I not give —

STORY OF SIX HAPPY YEARS

but I will not weakly echo the wail which age has vainly uttered ever since Adam ceased to delve and Eve to spin.

Friends of other days, do not look for a consecutive story of these last years. All I can trace to-night on the smooth-worn tablets of memory are a few events — surprisingly few. Perhaps in some other light another group of events might stand out, but this will have to remain as the only record I shall leave.

By prudence and safe investment of little as they have come to hand, the losses of my middle life have been in part made good, and I now have the comfort of knowing that my loved ones will not come to want.

The children of my old age passed safely through the ailments and diseases incident to childhood and are both well and strong. The selfish struggle of childhood's years for supremacy, one over the other, gradually wore

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

itself out, and in its stead has grown up between the sisters a self-denying love, the thought of which brings tears to my age-weakened eyes. And along with this sisterly love has grown a fondness akin to adoration for their mother, and, too, a devotion to their grandfatherly father which I have never seen outside the old-time novels.

.

The dear old "grandma," — my mother, who so long and patiently waited for release from the growing ills and ailments of age, whose shut-in life here, nearly blind, and with rarely a sound from the outer world, seemed to her needlessly prolonged, — the son-worshipping mother, whose devotion knew no other change than steady growth, was years ago laid beside the children of her youth, in the old family burying-ground in the far East. The call for which she had long waited came in the silence of that night on

STORY OF SIX HAPPY YEARS

which, fifty odd years before, she had watched through the long hours for the coming of the son who was to be so much to her in her old age. Not in agony of pain were her last moments spent. Her good-night kisses had been given then, as was her habit of mind, with the thought that they might prove to be the last; she had lain over on her side and fallen asleep—that was all. On her wrinkled face there was rest and peace, the peace that passeth the understanding of youth but is part of the mystical lore which comes to souls long past the sunset of life.

.

The next event that looms up large in my memory is the departure of the girls for school. Long had we debated between our home college and the mother's *alma mater*; between our small purse and our large ambition for our children; between our selfish desire to have the dear ones with us every day

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

to brighten our lives, and a heroic purpose to give them the full benefit of that new world beyond the horizon on which they had gazed almost unbrokenly from infancy, — the new associations which in our time had meant so much to us, the sense of individual responsibility, the self-reliance compelled by new experiences.

My statement of the case begs the question. How much the inevitable decision meant to us! For the first time my Mary realized that she was young no longer. I had long felt my age; had long been possessed of the fear that, after all my dreaming and planning, I should not live to see the fruition of my hopes in my children's lives; had long and often pondered my wife's prayer that we might die on the same day and, but for the children, would have selfishly echoed the words.

How old we felt as we drew up close to

STORY OF SIX HAPPY YEARS

the hearth that chill September evening after my return alone! I could not fail to see over my reading spectacles the wrinkles in the bereaved mother's face, accentuated as they were by the fitful light of the grate fire. The parenthetical lines inclosing her now firm-set mouth were carved deeper than ever before. As we sat there well on into the night, most of the time her hand in mine, her head on my shoulder, I told, and then retold with more of fulness, and later with still further amplification, the story of our journey, of our arrival, our reception, the arrangement of the furniture and pictures in the girls' room, their first appearance in chapel, their old father's pride in their simple yet dignified bearing, the gratifying comparisons he instituted as he sat watching that "garden of girls." Recalling the scene, the two on whom his heart was set stood out as prominently as does the princess in the puzzle-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

picture, whom one sees so vividly and others cannot see at all.

And so my story ran on, until I reached the parting hour, when the hot tears of the girls fell on my face and I broke down completely. They stubbornly insisted on going with me to the depot; but I, for once more stubborn than they, too well knew what a spectacle of weakness their doting father would present, and so insisted that we have it out in the privacy of their room. After my escape from the ordeal I rushed downstairs and out into the street as fast as my tear-blinded eyes would permit. As I stood on the platform at the station it seemed to me I must go back and, gathering my babies in my arms, take them home to their mother!

All this and more I told, concealing naught of my pitiable weakness, where I had thought to be so strong.

STORY OF SIX HAPPY YEARS

But that, too, was years ago. Since then how much has happened to them, how little to us! I need scarcely set down the inevitable fact that the two who went forth mere grown-up girls came home to us, four years later, in all respects well-rounded women. Their old high-school admirers had long since been outgrown. The young collegians of about their own ages seemed to them strangely immature and wanting in ambition to do real service or to be of real importance in the world. Then, too, there had crept into the girls' manner toward us at home an indefinable air of patronage, too delicate, too agreeable, to be resented or resisted. Had we been younger, this new attitude toward us might have been trying to our sensibilities; but — to me especially — there was in their caressing tenderness the tribute which generous youth delights to pay old age, and which jealous age comes to ex-

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

pect as its right, or at least as a compensation for something it has lost.

.

But I would not pass the event of their graduation without a word of comment. It had been our plan from the first to keep the girls two years apart in their studies, as they are in years. But the prolonged illness of Ada in her girlhood, and the unbroken progress of Marie, brought the two together in the college classrooms, and together they were graduated.

Ada was valedictorian of her class, and right womanfully did she perform her part. When she concluded her scholarly oration with the few words addressed to the president and to the class, though many about her were weeping, her large, luminous blue eyes were free from tears. A slight tremor in her voice alone betrayed the emotion transmitted to her classmates. I need not add

STORY OF SIX HAPPY YEARS

that I was proud of the tall, slender, intelligent and withal attractive young woman who so well voiced the strangely mingled gladness and sadness, eagerness and fear, with which young womanhood looks out from college windows upon actual life.

How shall I speak of the second one to bring honor upon us on that commencement day? She too was tall, but more robust than her sister; erect, strong-limbed, full-chested, large-waisted — large as compared with the fashion-plates of the period; her long and thick brown hair braided and fastened in a great coil loosely hanging well down her gracefully sloping neck; the rich color of her cheeks bringing out the pink whiteness of her complexion. As she stood listening to the president's parting words and waiting for the presentation of the diplomas, her blue-gray eyes, half-ringed underneath with heavy shaded lines such as actresses affect, glanced

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

absent-mindedly about the room, then settled upon the beautiful scene framed by the big window on the right. On hearing her name called she woke from her reverie, and with the ease of utter unconsciousness walked to the front of the stage, bowed respectfully but not low as she received her diploma, and, oblivious of the liberal applause which greeted her, calmly returned and resumed her seat. Her fond father, sitting in the body of the house, was made more vain than before — if possible — by comments such as these exchanged about him: “A beautiful girl!” “And so unconscious!” “Evidently unspoiled by the world!” Ay, thank God for that!



XXIX

A DAY OF DAYS

DECEMBER 4, 1902. — A red-letter day this in our family, henceforth and forever more! On this day thirty years ago my Mary and I were wedded; and on this day, in this year of grace 1902, the desire of our hearts — that our loved ones should be well mated and happily married — found consummation.

Too deeply stirred to think of sleep, I will devote the night to putting upon paper a few impressions made by the event of the day, prefacing them with an outline sketch of occurrences leading down to that event.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

They met "the usual way" — by seeming chance. The older of the two young men whom I am to call my sons is the junior member of a metropolitan law firm that has four names on its letter-head. He had been too busy to think of matrimony, and his brief vacations had been mainly spent in fishing and hunting in the Nipigon region somewhere in Canada, remote from civilization and from femininity. The uncertain health of his father, with the expressed wish of his mother, dissuaded him from making his usual trip this summer, but not from taking a brief rest on the shore of a beautiful inland lake within a few hours' ride of his home.

There he met an invalid friend attended by a younger brother who was a civil engineer, and whose successful experiences, East and West, proclaimed him a coming man — a doer of the word.

A lawn party at a neighboring cottage

where our daughters were visiting was the beginning of the end ; to which sailing parties, more lawn-parties, a ball at the inn, and the inevitable golf, were all together contributory.

Our girls had planned each for herself a career of usefulness. The elder was to be a librarian, and had expected to take a two-years' course in an Eastern library school. The younger had seriously thought of medicine and surgery with a view to a career as a specialist. Accustomed now to their absence, I was pleased on the whole to find their ambitions were taking a practical turn. When they started for the lake I said to them :

“Let your projects lie in fallow for a while; have a good time and” — looking at Ada — “come back well and strong for whatever work you may decide to undertake.”

They literally took my advice. They had the best time of their lives, and — their plans

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

for an independent career are still lying in fallow.

A few weeks after the girls' return came the lawyer and the engineer, "hunting in couples," and their coming brought both joy and consternation to our theretofore quiet home.

"What does it mean, girls?" I asked.

Ada's quick answer was, "Oh, nothing, father. You don't understand the ways of young men nowadays. All there is of it is this: they came to know us pretty well at the lake, and so they thought it would be nice to come our way home — that's all. You know it is n't much out of their way."

I turned to Marie for her confirmation of the report, but she was gone.

They came, looked us over, and finding in us no insuperable objection — lingered. A college friend in town made a party for them, and that was the beginning of "social

A DAY OF DAYS

activities " which, after ten days, compelled us, in Ada's behalf, to call a halt.

On the morning following their announced departure I was surprised by a formal visit from the young men. The result was an engagement with three distinct "ifs," which my conservatism suggested — though in fact I was satisfied that the girls' hearts had chosen wisely, as I had already made full inquiry and found no flaws in the records the young men had made.

.

That was a year ago last fall, and now, while I write, our two heart-treasures are on their way to the metropolis under the gentle shepherding of two young men who love them devotedly, love them for themselves alone — one of the consolations of the poor who have marriageable daughters.

"But," my lady friends will say, "are n't you going to describe the wedding?"

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

My present confusion of mind and my weak wrist and arm inform me that I can indulge only in generalization.

"It was a very pretty wedding," so they all said; but I guess "they" always kindly say as much. The venerable preacher who performed the ceremony is our old friend and pastor who thirty years ago so tenderly pronounced the words that made us husband and wife.

They decided that it should be a home wedding, "because mother's was," said Ada. "And because nobody will be there but our real friends," added Marie.

Our little house was redolent of flowers, — flowers everywhere. The tawny face of our Ada was almost pale, but her head was erect and her step firm. The pupils of her eyes were dilated, and there was a slight tremor in the hand resting so confidently on my arm. At the dinner table her humor

was irresistible, but we who knew her best sounded a hysterical note in her laugh. We were glad when the evening's strain was over and she was safely in her carriage and on her way to the depot. Marie was silent — not sulkily dumb, as in the old times when things went wrong, but radiantly silent as if stricken dumb with a miracle of grace. All seemed to understand it, and no cloud darkened the occasion.

I have no talent for reporting weddings, and little inclination to play reporter on this occasion ; and when I come to the partings which followed the feasting I dare not trust myself to speak. They were harder to bear than sudden partings are, for it is the arrival of the inevitable and long-expected that wrings the life from out old hearts.

Let me close this labored effort with what may seem to be a commonplace comment. The young men and young women who are

proud to claim Ada and Marie as their friends never paid them a rarer compliment than by the omission of all the silly and semi-brutal pranks which I am informed are still played upon newly married couples on their departure for their wedding journey. To me such pranks are well-nigh unthinkable in connection with *our* daughters and the husbands they have chosen ; but in this irreverent age I feared it might not be safe to rely on popular respect for anything which we of the past regard as sacred.



XXX

LAST WORDS

DECEMBER 31, 1902. — Here, on the last day of the year, I arbitrarily bring my relation to a close. I might go on to the end, — which at farthest is not far removed, for I need no physician to tell me that my persistent heart grows weary and must soon cease to beat. The wonder of wonders in the physical man is that it beats at all. Who winds it up? Who regulates it and keeps it in repair? Think of the work it does, without vacation, “lay-off” or strike! Lying wrapped up in bed — not sick, simply lazy, —

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

I have turned statistician for the moment, and by a lengthy calculation have figured that the average man of seventy with an average of seventy pulsations to the minute has been served by this vital organ to the extent of two billion, five hundred and seventy-five million, four hundred and forty thousand heart-beats! Now, since the word of the Psalmist and the figures of the actuaries practically agree that the natural life of man is threescore and ten, and I have already overdrawn my account with nature to the extent of nearly two hundred million heart-beats, I need no word of authority to inform me that if, haply (or unhappily), my days be lengthened to fourscore years, they must inevitably be a weariness to me and to those who should care for me. Certain am I, however, that my dear ones will not be wanting in the least detail of loving care.

And why should n't my story end, as in fact it should have begun, with a marriage? I know that the great epoch-making books, from "Job" to "Faust," are tragedies, and that in those tragedies is to be found the whole history of humanity; and that that history is little more than, as Goethe puts it, "the suicidal destruction of man's pursuit of absolute personal freedom and self-satisfaction," or as the wiser Shakespeare has it, the extraction of "good out of the follies and perversities of man and the whole motley and contradictory play of earthly things." But my simple narrative is clearly not a drama, nor is it biography, for its contents are wholly circumstantial, contingent on moods and tenses. It will therefore be excusable in me, if not positively a relief to my readers, to cut short my story before the inevitable break shall occur.

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

I attended a funeral yesterday of "a still strong man," young in years, just past fifty, stalwart of mind and soul as in figure, keenly alert to every sound from the great world of activities in which he had long borne a laborer's part, a captain of future captains of industry, an inspiration to the world of thought, in which he moved with kingly tread. As I looked down into his battle-scarred face and thought of how much another quarter-century of time would have meant to him and to his wife and children, and to the youth whom he was born to lead, I forgot for the moment the joys of these my last years, the comfort I had been to my dear ones, the little and steadily narrowing world of friends in which I hold an honorable place, the larger world in which I had borne but an indifferent part, but yet enough to give me deep interest in its every effort for progress and reform — I forgot all this for the time, and from the depths of my

LAST WORDS

heart I asked my God why the aged weakling had been spared, and he, the strong doer of the word, had been stricken down in the midst of his resultful and far-reaching activities. The preacher in his funeral sermon quoted Sill's masterly epitome of Life:

“Forenoon, and afternoon, and night, — forenoon,
And afternoon, and night, — forenoon, and — what!
The empty song repeats itself. No more?
That is Life : make this forenoon sublime,
This afternoon a psalm, this night a prayer,
And time is conquered, and thy crown is won.”

I, too, can say from a full heart, and from a memory clearly traversing the allotted threescore and ten, that that indeed is life: “Forenoon, and afternoon, and night,” and so on and on through days dark and bright; many days so dark it has seemed at times as though the sun were permanently darkened; and other days —

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

these last days — so fair that heaven has seemed to lie all about me in my old age. But, as in infancy, so now, whether dark or fair, the days of a man constitute his life. When I dare to think of wasted years — and other years that of themselves seem worse than wasted — the daring thought takes flight before that other thought which, as I remember, was given voice in these recollections away back somewhere in the seventies, that had the events of these seemingly worse than wasted years been otherwise, they would have led down to another series of events than that which I have tried to outline, in which the dear ones who have figured in these pages, whose individualities mean so much to me, would have had no place whatever.

As I said years ago when I began to think of myself as old, so say I now in full consciousness that I am well on in the night

LAST WORDS

of years: "Best as it is, or it had not been." Though the fierce forenoon of my life never rose to the exalted level of the sublime, and though life's afternoon with me was not in any sense a psalm, I feel I can with heart of truth declare that the delightfully long drawn out evening-time, with the star-illuminated night on which I am well entered, has indeed been a prayer. During the past thirty years I have not been conscious of a moment when the attitude of my soul was other than that of thankfulness, and when my sincere desire was not for the world's good and for the welfare of the loved ones who have made my last years idyllic, — who have made me in spirit, as in life, a new man.

If it is true that in the life beyond we shall meet and converse with those who have influenced us here, I shall want to meet my old friend Nicodemus and thank him for his

AN OLD MAN'S IDYL

suggestive question, "How can a man be born when he is old?" — a question over which I pondered long some thirty years ago — a question to which these pages give the answer my heart has come to know.

THE END



113504

LE.

J715nz

Author Johnson, Wolcott

Title An old man's idyl.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
LIBRARY

Do not
remove
the card
from this
Pocket.

Acme Library Card Pocket
Under Pat. "Ref. Index File."
Made by LIBRARY BUREAU

